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ON THE EPISTLES
TO THE
SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.



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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A

PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

OF

THE EPISTLES

TO THE

WITHDRAWN

SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.



BY THE

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PREFACE.

IN presuming to offer an exposition of any portion of the mysterious book in which the Epistles to the Churches are contained, the Author is not unmindful of the commendation which Joseph Scaliger bestowed on Calvin, viz. That he had shown his sense as much by not commenting on the Book of Revelation, as he had by the manner in which he had commented on the other Books of the Bible. With this in his recollection, he ought not, perhaps, to have ventured to publish even upon this small but important portion of the Book of Revelation; he has, however, been influenced by the consideration that although all may not agree

precisely in the interpretation, none are likely to differ in their view of the invaluable practical lessons, and the sublime and cheering promises which are the chief characteristics of these Epistles.

In agreeing with some commentators* in thinking it not improbable that the state of the Seven Churches of Proconsular Asia, was typical of the state of the Christian Church during seven different periods, reaching from the apostolical age to the end of time, the Author desires not to dogmatise upon so obscure a subject, but simply to present the view, as at least an interesting one, to the consideration of his readers. He is by no means wedded to this particular interpretation, nor shall he quarrel with any for differing from

* Many before the Reformation; and Brightman, Forbes, Mede, More, Gill, Sir Isaac Newton, Vitringa, Lampe, and others, since that period.

him upon a point of such uncertainty; his chief object and aim have been to find the Lord Jesus Christ in all these Epistles, as the great Head of the Church, manifesting Himself as the Creator, the Saviour, the Sanctifier of His people,—at once the Beginner of their faith, and the consummation of their joy.

If he have succeeded in this, and in conveying to the minds and hearts of the true children of God, more elevated and more comforting and more influential views of Him, whom having not seen, they love, he shall be thankful, although he may not carry them with him in the particular mode of interpretation which he has adopted. Should he have failed in both these objects, he would still venture to hope that the direct personal appeals, and the close and pointed applications to the conscience, abounding in these remarkable Epistles, may not be without a blessing either to himself, or

to those into whose hands his work may fall; and he would in all humility rest this expectation upon the promise so clearly conveyed in Rev. i. 3, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy," earnestly desiring the prayers of his readers that this blessing may not be withheld.

Streatham Rectory,
Feb. 1st, 1838.

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PRACTICAL EXPOSITION,

LECTURE I.

REVELATION i. 3.

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.

THE astonishing book from which these words are taken, and to the contents of which they so remarkably refer is undoubtedly less known, and less read, and less valued by the generality of Christians, than any other portion of the canon of Scripture. It is viewed by unthinking persons as a mere collection of unintel-

ligible visions, in which they can have no possible concern, and which, if they peruse at all, it is rather from a sort of undefinable pleasure, imparted by the gorgeous descriptions, and the dim, though terrific shadowings of those things which pass within the veil, than from any very serious expectation of deriving permanent and spiritual improvement. It is remarkable then, and as if with the intention of guarding us against that frame of mind in which, as the foreknowledge of God was perfectly aware, we should be tempted to view this revelation of his will, that we have the direct assertion of the text, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear, the words of this prophecy;" and it is still more remarkable, that this is the only book in the canon of Scripture, and these the only prophecies, to the perusal of which so high an honour is attached, so peculiar a promise vouchsafed.

It is, however, but justice to confess, that very plausible excuses for the total neglect of this mysterious book have been furnished, by the injudicious and intemperate efforts of many of its commentators, who forgetting that prophecy was not intended to make men prophets, have brought the study of it into disrepute, by the repeated failures of their own unwarranted predictions. We cannot, however, regret the less, on that account, that those portions of the prophecy, which are plain and obvious should be consigned to absolute neglect; and because much has been misinterpreted, and much is incapable, at present, of interpretation, that the whole of this invaluable record of divine truth should be suffered to lie disregarded and unread. For however great may be the difficulties attached to the more advanced portions of the prophecy, the contents of the second and third chapters, containing the seven epistles to the seven

churches of Proconsular Asia, are of so peculiarly instructive a character, so full of individual interest, and of practical improvement, that it is impossible to read them with any attention, without being impressed by the invaluable lessons of Christian doctrine and practice, the earnest calls to repentance and amendment of life, and the encouraging promises of assistance and acceptance, which they so abundantly contain. Impressed with these feelings, we trust it will be no unprofitable employment to tread together this hallowed ground, to linger for awhile in this vestibule of the temple of prophecy, and wonder and adore ; while ever and anon we catch a passing glance through the thin veil which hangs between, of the things which have been seen, “ and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”*

It is the commonly received opinion, in which Bishop Newton, and Scott, and

* Revelation i. 19.

most of the modern commentators unite, that the epistles, to which we have referred, were merely directions to the seven different churches to which they are addressed; and prophetic, only so far as regarded the fate of those particular churches. Notwithstanding these high authorities, however, we are disposed to believe that while these epistles no doubt contained messages expressly applicable to the churches whose name they bear, they had also a secondary application of a less obvious and literal character: since it is most improbable that in a book, every other portion of which is highly prophetic, figurative, and symbolical, these opening chapters alone should be merely literal and didactic.

We consider, then, that these seven epistles, taken in the order in which they were written, portray as types, and possibly predict as prophecies, the different states of the Christian Church,

from the period at which they were penned, through seven successive ages, stretching through all time, and reaching even unto the end of the world. Thus fulfilling the expectation of our text, that we are about to read a very interesting series of types or prophecies, and not merely of spiritual lessons, however useful; and thereby keeping up a close and obvious analogy with all the remaining prophecies, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials, which occupy the larger portion of this astonishing book.

So far, then, as the types in these epistles have been hitherto fulfilled, it will be one of the intentions of these discourses to point out their accomplishment. Prophecy is every hour changing into history; what was prophecy to one generation, becomes history to their children: thus the Babylonish captivity, for instance, which was prophecy to Jeremiah, was history to

Daniel; the coming of the Messiah, which was prophecy to every generation from Adam to Malachi, was history to the apostles; the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, which were prophecy to the apostles, were history to the fathers of the Christian Church; while the events which were prophecy to our fathers, have become, by the wonderful facts of the last forty years, history to us.

It is, then, with prophecy which has become history, with types which have been merged in their antitypes, that while on this portion of each of the epistles, we shall be engaged; trusting that so doing, we shall inherit the especial promise of the text, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear, the words of this prophecy;" and praying, that the consideration may tend to excite, both in the mind of him who readeth, and of you who hear, a stronger persuasion of the intimate foreknowledge

and wonderful counsel of God, and of the deep and blessed interest which the Lord Jesus Christ has ever taken, and will ever take, in the well-being of his Church; until He has guided her vessel through all the storms and tempests that await her here, and carried her in safety to the haven where she would be.

Prophecy, however, under whatever shape, will form but a very small portion of our observations. The blessing of the text extends not merely to reading and to hearing, but to “keeping those things that are written therein;” for it is scarcely possible, throughout the whole of the Scriptures of truth, to select a passage so abundant in warning, so replete with encouragement, above all, so full of practical advice, as are these seven epistles to the churches. Our earnest prayer, therefore, is, that while we but slightly glance at the completion of their prophecies, we may be led to speak plainly, usefully, and affectionately

upon the great practical lessons they bequeath to us; that as each stage of the Church's history passes in rapid review before us, we may gather some word of profit for our own souls, some practical suggestion for the improvement of our own hearts and conversation.

Having thus referred, as we felt it necessary to do, to the nature of those subjects which we hope to place before you in the following discourses, we shall proceed to offer some brief remarks upon the manner in which these important messages, or epistles, were communicated to St. John, to deliver them to the churches for which they were in the first instance more immediately designed, and to commit them as a perpetual possession to the universal Church of Christ, that they might take their place in the canon of Scripture, and hang among the brightest lamps of the sanctuary for ever.

We derive the account from the pen

of the beloved apostle himself, in the chapter from which the text is taken, where we read at the 9th verse, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me, and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man."

Such is the august and striking man-

ner in which these deeply interesting communications were made to the evangelist. In other instances of Divine communication, we find the Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes revealing His messages to the sons of men, in dreams or visions of the night; at others by the silent and subtile inspiration of the Holy Spirit, no one knowing "whence it cometh, or whither it goeth;" but here, the revelation was made in his own person and by himself; while, as we shall presently see, never did the Divine Saviour of the world appear before the eyes of His people in so impressive and majestic a form, and never shall He so appear again, until He shall come in the clouds of heaven, and every eye shall see him,* as He manifested Himself upon that Sabbath day, to that lonely and desolate exile in the Isle of Patmos. So true is it, that "as the sufferings of Christ

* Revelation i. 7.

abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ ;”* that never does the Saviour call forth one of his believing people in any age, to an especial degree of suffering, or trial, or temptation, or sorrow, without compensating, and far more than compensating him, by the richer consolations of His love, by the fuller and more glorious manifestations of Himself. We believe, even at the present hour, that many a poor and wretched hovel, whose despised inmate is a partaker of the sufferings of Christ, is enriched and enlightened by the spiritual presence of the Redeemer to an extent to which the fairest mansion of the unsuffering Christian is utterly a stranger ; while probably even St. John himself, close and intimate as was his knowledge of the Saviour, and dear and constant his communion with Him while on earth, never beheld half His glories, or con-

* 2 Corinthians i. 5.

ceived of half His majesty and power, until now in his hour of despondency and trial, banished from the abodes of men "for the testimony of Jesus," he was visited by Christ Himself in person in the island of his exile.

Before we speak of the supernatural appearance which our Lord assumed on this occasion, we must advert to the situation in which the apostle, when he had turned himself, as he expresses it, upon hearing that "great voice, as of a trumpet," first beheld the Saviour. It was "in the midst of the seven candlesticks."* These, as we are afterwards informed,† typified the seven churches to which the Epistles were to be addressed; and if these again were, as we believe, types of the seven different stages of the Christian Church throughout all time; the fact of our Lord revealing Himself as standing, or walking in the midst of them,

* Revelation i. 13.

† See 20th verse.

demonstrates how incessantly He is employed in watching over, in caring for, and guiding His Church on earth ; blessing it with His continual presence, and daily fulfilling His most gracious promise, “ Lo ! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

While the Church is symbolised not by candles, but by “ candlesticks,” showing that although eminently serviceable in dispensing the light, it has no light of itself, but that it stands as a mere depositary of the light of God’s word, and of God’s grace, in every age, among the benighted people of the world ; holding forth to them that radiance which is shed from the fountain of light, upon its ministers and people. The candlesticks were “ golden,” to mark the matchless value of a Christian church, and a Christian ministration. Yet, brethren, as the eye of the apostle fell upon those golden branches, be sure it dwelt not for a moment upon their

inimitable beauty, but saw, and saw only, Him who stood among them. So let it be with you; learn to look beyond the most valuable of duties, the most golden of ordinances, to the Saviour, from whom alone they derive their beauty, their excellence, and their power. Value your Church, and next to the Saviour, you cannot value her too dearly; but remember, that she herself desires to be accounted but as the humble handmaid of her Lord. In all her prayers she teaches you to look to Christ; in all her praises, to dwell on Christ; in all her offices, to draw near to Christ; as every ray of light which beams from the golden candlesticks, and brings knowledge, or grace, or love into your souls, is from Him "who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto," and is indeed the great source of light itself; so does your apostolical Church desire that every ray should be reflected back again to its

Divine source, conveying glory, and thanksgiving, and honour, and praise, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

We proceed with the detail which the apostle gives of the appearance of the Saviour. "He was clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters."*

The long "garment down to the foot," was expressly appointed by God to be worn by the High Priest. By our Lord therefore appearing in this sacerdotal garment, He revealed to St. John, that although in heaven, He still retains the office of the Priesthood, conferred upon Him as Mediator,

* Revelation i. 13, 14, 15.

by the Almighty, when, as it is written, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec."* It was as a Priest that the apostle says, "Christ entered into heaven with His own blood," and after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice," for ever sat down at the right hand of God; "for by one offering, He hath perfected for ever, them that are sanctified." It is as a Priest, that the Lord Jesus Christ stands at this moment before the throne of God, presenting His merits in behalf of his people, and offering there, their petitions and their praises.

But He was also "girt about the paps with a golden girdle." Among eastern nations, the girdle was a most essential portion of the attire, when prepared for any active employment; it

* Psalm cx. 4.

was not worn in the house, but put on preparatory to engaging in exercise; and to this frequent allusion is made in the gospels, "the loins girded," being a proverbial expression for readiness for action. Our Lord therefore manifesting Himself as girded, demonstrated that He was actively employed; that although glorified, although returned to the everlasting joys of His kingdom, He was still the wakeful, watchful, indefatigable guardian of His Church. That He who had once girded Himself with a towel, and washed His disciple's feet, had now put on his golden girdle of kingly dignity, for higher and more noble services; that He was gone, as He had predicted, to prepare thrones for his apostles, upon which they should sit with Him, judging the twelve tribes of Israel; and that not they alone, but that all who, by His strength, should be enabled to overcome, should sit down with him upon His throne, even as

He also overcame, and is set down with His Father upon His throne.

In continuing the description of our Lord, we read that "His head and His hair were as white as snow." This is a very striking peculiarity in the appearance of Christ upon this occasion; it must have rendered him totally different from the same Jesus, whom St. John had last beheld, hurried from the earth, when only three and thirty years of mortal life had been completed. There is every reason to believe that this appearance was adopted in the present instance by Christ to mark His eternity and divinity, since it forms a complete counterpart to that description of the great Jehovah, in the 7th chapter of Daniel, where it is said, "I beheld the Ancient of days, whose garment was as white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool." By our Lord therefore appearing thus, he seems to mark His identity with God the Father.

Again. "His eyes were like a flame of fire," piercing and penetrating into all things; this agrees well with that declaration of St. Peter, "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do," and portrays therefore the omniscience and omnipresence of the "everlasting Son of the Father."

The "brazen feet," symbolise the strength, and firmness, and decision of all the footsteps of Christ, whether in providence or grace; while His "voice," described "as the sound of many waters," marks at once its majesty and power. His "face shone as the sun shineth in his strength;" thus preserving while in glory precisely the same appearance witnessed by this very apostle, on the mount of transfiguration, where "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light, so as no fuller on earth could white them."*

* Mark ix. 3.

Such, brethren, was the appearance of that wonderful Being when He delivered those important prophecies, and those valuable spiritual instructions, which we hope to place before you; that gracious Saviour, by whose name every individual among us this day is called, in whose house we are now assembled, to whose kingdom we hope we are journeying, and in whose presence we profess to desire to spend a glorious and happy eternity.

Examine, then, your knowledge of Him in all His offices, by the portraiture which has now been set before you. Dwell upon each particular, in the silence of your own chamber, until you realise His immediate presence, and actually hold converse with Himself. To assist you in this, consider—The predictions of our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrate that He is a Prophet; it is the prophet's office to instruct, as well as to predict. Have you, with a

humble, teachable heart, sought your instruction in divine things, at the lips of Christ Himself, and by the influence of His good Spirit? The “garment down to the foot” has proclaimed Him to be a Priest; are you looking for acceptance simply to the great atonement, which none but a priest could offer, and expecting answers to your prayers simply through that intercession, which none but a priest could make?

His “golden girdle” declared Him to be a King; is he then your King? is His will your law; His word your rule of life; and can you truly say, “Other Lords besides thee have had dominion over us,” but now we own no king but Thee; no ruler but Thyself? If you have thus accepted Him as your Prophet, Priest, and King, with your whole heart, every other portion of the description will well harmonise with the image of the Saviour, already formed* within your breast.

* See Galatians iv. 19

You will rejoice that “His eyes are as a flame of fire,” for you will know, that with them he watches about your path and about your bed, that no evil should come nigh your dwelling; that with them he looks into your heart, and however men may misunderstand or misrepresent you, He sees the smallest desire after holiness, the first bursting of the seed of grace which He Himself has sown, and will accept “according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.”*

Again when those around you are changing, and earthly friends are falling from you by caprice and death, while all else is mutable, you will delight in looking upon that head “as white as snow,” which recalls your Lord to you, as one who inhabiteth eternity, and you will turn to Him, “the Ancient of days,” who has said, “I am the Lord, I change not,” “Jesus Christ, the

* 2 Corinthians viii. 12.

same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ;” and you will find him to be a never-failing, never-varying friend. And when you shall be called to struggle with the last great enemy, you will cling the closer with a true and living faith to Him, who went down Himself into the tomb, and with His “feet of brass,” bruised for ever the serpent’s head, and trampled upon the powers of darkness in their own dominions; and you will receive from Him the fulfilment of His own most blessed promise, “thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.”*

Nay, the grave itself shall not rob you of the blessings with which this appearance of our Lord presents you, for even there, amidst the silence and the gloom of its narrow dwelling-house, shall you hear His powerful voice, “as the sound of many waters,”† calling you up to liberty and life in that great

* Deuteronomy xxxiii. 25.

† Revelation i. 15.

day, when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; and He shall say unto you who have departed this life in His faith and fear, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." For all these are among the covenanted blessings which Christ Himself has promised to those who read, and hear, and keep the things, which are written in the book of life.

EPISTLE TO EPHESUS.

LECTURE II.

REVELATION ii. 5.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place. except thou repent.

IN pursuance of the intention expressed in the last lecture, we are now to commence our observations upon the first of the seven epistles to the churches of Proconsular Asia. May that blessed Spirit, who in these portions of Holy writ once spake unto the churches, be, upon each occasion of our considering them, poured out

upon us, and may He who "hath the residue of the Spirit," direct these imperfect efforts to the furtherance of the work of divine grace in our hearts, and to the permanent extension of his own kingdom and glory. The first epistle is inscribed to the angel or bishop of the church of Ephesus, which we imagine to have been first selected by our Lord, because, from the peculiar circumstances of that church, it formed the best epitome of the state of the whole Christian Church, at the particular period alluded to in this epistle. It was indeed a picture of "the things which are," in reference to the command given by Christ to the apostle, in the preceding chapter, when he said, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter."*

We consider, then, this epistle as

* Revelation i. 19.

marking primarily, the condition of the Church of Ephesus at the time when it was written ; and secondarily, the characteristics of the Church of Christ in the apostolical age, when it still retained much of sincere and heartfelt love of the truth as it is in Jesus, and a zealous opposition to false teachers, such as Ebion and Cerinthus, and their doctrines, with which, as our Lord foretold, "they should deceive many ;" when the desire of labouring and suffering for Christ still possessed the hearts of a large proportion of its members ; and yet, when in comparison of what it had been, during the first trying, but blessed years of that church's history, rapid indeed had been the decline, and wide the separation from the first strong feelings of love, that burned in the hearts of the early converts, when they "were together, and had all things common," and "did eat their meat with gladness and single-

ness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people.”*

These are the words of the epistle: “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”†

Such, then, was the character of the Church of Ephesus, and such was also a general portraiture of the Church of the Redeemer in the age when the epistle was dictated by our Lord.

If any are incredulous, that, at this early period, the great Head of the Church, while he saw so much to commend, should also see so much to

* Acts ii. 46, 47.

† Revelation ii. 2—4.

blame in the conduct of his children ; we have only to refer them to the epistles of St. Paul, and they will find that far stronger expressions are there employed in speaking of the conduct of many to whom they are addressed, than are made use of here ; and that the happy period, when Christians loved as the brethren of a single family, and lived around a common table, must indeed have been most lamentably brief ; since scarcely an epistle can be named, in which contributions for their poorer members are not urged upon the churches, as if entreaty was necessary to its fulfilment, and in which the reputed divisions among them are not spoken of, as if too probable to be doubted. But there is so much of personal application in this epistle, that we shall not dwell upon the prophetic or typical view of it, but proceed at once to those important practical lessons with which it is replete. “ I

know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil." We need not remind you, that this intimate knowledge which our Lord possessed of the church to which He then was writing, He possesses at this moment of every one of us. Many among you, brethren, are, no doubt, more than merely nominal followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; you have been taught by His Spirit; you are depending simply upon His atonement; you are endeavouring, by His grace, to express your gratitude and your obedience by a heart devoted to His will, and a life, in some degree at least, we trust, dedicated to His service. How encouraging, then, is the reflection that not one advancing effort which you have ever made in the way of holiness, not a sinful gratification which you have foregone, not an evil habit, or person, or thing, from which you have separated, or a

labour of love which you have performed for his name's sake, of which He does not as distinctly say to you, as He here said to the Church of Ephesus, I know it, and know it with approbation, (for this is the meaning of the phrase as it occurs in the Scripture before us) "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience." Your gracious Redeemer knows them, indeed, as they really are, tainted with sin, full of imperfection which no one will more readily acknowledge than yourselves; but then he knows them also, as the sincere though feeble efforts of a child, anxious to manifest his love, and gratitude, and obedience, to an indulgent father; and that Saviour even now delights in every such work of charity or kindness, or ministering for Him, as He once did in the offering of that poor woman in Bethany, which worthless as it was, rejoiced his heart, and received His commendation, because

having been forgiven much, she loved much, and had "done what she could."

But there is encouragement in this message for more than you who are enabled to work and to labour for the Lord Jesus Christ. Every class, almost every individual among His people, may find a word of counsel and of comfort here. Are the sins of an ungodly world a trial and a grief to you? and though you may not be able with truth to express yourself in the strong language of David, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law,"* yet do you mourn over iniquities which you cannot prevent, and which deeply wound your soul, because they wound your Saviour? this also, then, he knows with approbation, "I know how thou canst not bear them which are evil." It is a most satisfactory and distinctive mark of our union with the Lord Jesus, when we can truly affirm,

* Psalm cxix. 136.

“every enemy of my Lord is beheld as an enemy by me; every arrow that is aimed at my Redeemer, pierces through my own soul also, and fills it with many sorrows.” But can you, on the other hand, behold the careless Sabbath-breaker, can you hear the oath of the profane, can you see the profligacy which fills our streets, can you read of, and can you know of, the thousands around you engaged in “evil, and only evil, and that continually,” living to themselves and to the world, and forgetting the God who made, and the Saviour who redeemed them; and can you talk lightly of their sins, and be indifferent to their fate, and take as much pleasure in their society, as if they were the obedient followers of God, and preparing for His kingdom, and living to His glory? Then, brethren, we are bound to tell you, that you want one distinctive mark at least, which is never wanting in the true

people of God, the separation from them that are evil; your "spot is not the spot of God's children," for He says of them, "I know thou canst not bear them which are evil." How careful then should we be in the choice of our intimate companions and friends! Does God say that His people cannot bear the company of the ungodly; and do I love, and court, and associate with them from choice! Surely there must be something very wrong in the state of my heart, or I could not so differ from my Lord and His believing followers. If society were constituted upon Christian principles, it would not be borne, that the presence of the profane swearer, or the open profligate, the gambler, or the adulterer, should be tolerated, because his vices are gilded by wealth, or dignified by rank; such men would be as effectually banished, as the more vulgar sinners whom the laws of their country remove

from the scene of their depredations and disgrace.

Again, in the epistle before us, there is a word for you, brethren—and in what assemblage like the present was it ever seen, that none such were included—for you who are sufferers, whether from sickness, or sorrow, or sin, and patient sufferers for the Lord's sake, He says to each of you, "I know how thou hast borne," i. e. suffered, "and hast patience, and for my name's sake, hast laboured and not fainted."* Your Lord has known many a secret trial, many an hour of sorrow and affliction through which you have passed, and which the world has never known. Your Lord has seen your domestic difficulties, your personal troubles, your moments of secret anguish, perhaps unrevealed even to your dearest friend; for there are sorrows which ought not and cannot be

* Revelation ii. 3.

communicated but to God alone; and yet you have not fainted, but persevered, and for His name's sake hast patience. Of all these, He says, in the language of commendation, "I know," them; I know your every prayer for guidance, your every effort to bear patiently and contentedly what I have laid upon you, and to profit by the visitation; to "hear the rod, and Him who appointed it;" your every endeavour against evil tempers and evil habits;—all these things, which man can never know, are known and valued by me. How delightful is the reflection to the child of God, that we have to do with one who judges, not as sinners judge, and who feels, not as even the kindest and the holiest friend on earth can feel towards our patient endurance, our shortcomings, or our slow advancements, but who looks even at the most feeble of his children as children still; and while those

around may blame us that we have borne our trials no better, and have advanced no farther and no faster on the heavenward road, He, that merciful Redeemer, commends us that we are still upon the road, and “have not fainted.”

The great office of the Christian minister—and the most blessed and delightful portion of our duty do we esteem it—is to fulfil the command of our God to His prophet of old, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.”* But while our Lord Himself, in the epistle before us, has given us, as we have just seen, a model for the method in which we should thus speak comfortably to those who need consolation, He gives us also in the verse which follows, an example of the

* Isaiah xl. 1, 2.

manner in which he blended, and in which we also are bound to blend, the plainest warnings and the most heart-searching reproofs, even with the fullest displays of God's tenderness and love, and the most abundant consolation. "Nevertheless," says the Great Head of the Church, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."*

If, then, even in this apostolical church-state, the Lord had a quarrel against His people, if He had "somewhat against" *them*, has He nothing against us? Nay, let us speak plainly; and suffer ye the word of reproof, as well as of encouragement and consolation; for, as the apostle said, "If I yet pleased man I should not be the servant of Christ."†

We ask you, then, has He, whom you serve, no charge to prefer against any of you, who, nevertheless, may really be among His people, of a simi-

* Revelation ii. 4.

† Galatians i. 10.

lar nature to this before us, that you also have left your first love? Remember for a moment, if you have been really turned to God, how much these subjects once engrossed your thoughts, how entirely they occupied your heart, when first by God's sovereign grace, they obtained admittance. Where, then, is now that strong and influential feeling of love to the Redeemer with which, when you began to appreciate your own necessities and His infinite mercy, your heart was filled? Then every thing yielded to this feeling; it was the first, the all-pervading, almost the only feeling which filled your heart, and directed your every action. What anxiety was there, then, for obtaining spiritual good for yourselves, or for imparting it to others! You would rather have risked the world's laugh, or the world's reproof, than have remained silent, when the cause of your God required you to speak. What plea-

sure had you then in secret communion with your Redeemer, and in dwelling upon the revealed and written word in those portions of your time, which you could snatch from the busy bustle of earth, and consecrate to heaven!

How is this now? Is the gold become dim? Is the fine gold changed? Is the inward spark decaying even while the flame still burns fiercely without? Then these are signs too plain to be mistaken, that the reproof before us belongs to some among ourselves: the Saviour has "somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." The present world and the attractions of its business, or its pleasures, have been too strong for the future world and the attractions of the cross: day by day, step by step, the former are gaining upon, and displacing the latter; you are more and more engrossed, and interested and possessed by subjects or occupations, which good and pro-

fitable as they are in their place, are still of the earth, earthy, and will not bear a moment's competition with the great business of your soul, the preparation for eternity. God grant that the present hour may arrest their progress, may re-ignite the dying fire, may re-establish the throne of the Redeemer within your bosom. For it is this love, the first love of the heart, which is the best and choicest offering you can bring to God; it is this alone which gives life and warmth to every other grace, and puts a soul into all your duties upon earth, and raises you upon angel wings, as near as mortal foot may tread to the threshold of heaven. It was beautifully said by one of old, "The hawk, while she is quick to take her prey, is set upon the hand of kings and nobles; but if she wax weak and die, she is cast off to the dunghill. Even so, while we are warm and fervent in love towards God and

his Christ, we are carried as it were on God's own hand; but if we faint and decay in love, we shall be cast lower than if we had never been seen so exalted." Be not content, unless you are thus living, as it were, on God's own hand; be satisfied with no lower place to rest upon; but ever as you feel sensible of your downward flight, be still endeavouring to soar upward upon the wings of faithful, persevering prayer, until you have regained that safe and happy eminence.

Must we add a threatening to our reproof? Then let it be in the words of our Lord Himself; "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."*

Remember whence thou art fallen; descend into your own heart; draw

* Revelation ii. 5.

aside the veil of self-love, that love which strengthens while all other love decays; mark out honestly and candidly, every instance in which it is not with you as in times past; acknowledge every deficiency in duty, every neglect of prayer, every forgetfulness of God, every secret sin, every growing symptom of indifference to the Lord who bought you to the sense of His abiding presence, to the obedience to His commands; and as that Lord himself says, "Repent and do the first works." Need we tell you what the first work of each convinced sinner, and therefore of each convicted backslider, must ever be? Seek again the cleansing blood of the Saviour; bring every instance of remembered transgression, or imperfect duty, at once to Him, and leave Him not until the "blood of sprinkling" has spoken pardon for your sins and peace to your soul, and brought you once more near to God. Then shall your

candlestick never be removed ; the light which is in you never be darkened ; but remember, that nothing short of this will insure the blessing ; for our Lord Himself declares, “I will come unto thee, and remove thy candlestick, except thou repent.”

The epistle before us concludes, as each of these remarkable epistles does, with a peculiar promise or blessing. “To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”*

“To him that overcometh ;” yes, great and glorious as are the rewards of God they are limited to those who overcome. But then, who are they ? where shall we find those privileged Christians who may hope that the title is their own ? Brethren, the word of God being our guide, we shall have no difficulty in this investigation. Let the beloved apostle return the answer ;

* Revelation ii. 7.

These are his words: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whosoever is born of God overcometh the world."* Have you reason to believe that you have been born again of the Spirit; that you are made the child of God by adoption and spiritual regeneration; that you have been renewed in the spirit of your mind, crucifying the world with its affections and lusts; if so, be of good cheer; the promise is your own; it is yours to enter, through the blood of Jesus Christ, into the city, and to partake of the tree of life which grows there, of which, if a man eat, he shall live for ever.

Well, therefore, does your Redeemer usher in this great and glorious promise by saying, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."† Yes, brethren, hear, as you have this day heard, the Spirit's consolations, the Spirit's warnings, but

* 1 John v. 1, 4.

† Revelation ii. 11.

above all, hear the Spirit's promises. It is generally in proportion as you are humbly but steadfastly believing these great things to be your own, purchased for you, pledged to you, and reserved in heaven for you, and you for them, that your gratitude, your consistency, and your holiness, will increase and abound. When the aspect of this world is lowering, or its events disappointing, when troubles distress you, or sin and temptations assail and harass you, dwell much, dwell confidently on the blessedness of those who overcome, and on the full assurance of hope that through grace you shall be among that happy number. Nothing so cheers and elevates the heart, nothing carries it so entirely above the reach of this world's miseries, as an habitual dwelling upon the promised future, as your own; the inheritance, of which you have already received the earnest in the first fruits of the Spirit, and of which all shall unquestionably

soon be yours, if you are Christ's. It is this belief which not only robs death of his sting, and the grave of its victory, but as certainly and as effectually robs the world of the largest share of its attractions, and every station in life of the most dangerous portion of its allurements and temptations; lie down, therefore, in peace upon this persuasion, that now living near to God, now rejoicing to run the way of His commandments, the day is not far distant when you shall, in close and intimate communion with the Redeemer, "eat of the tree of life," and live for ever; and with the redeemed of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, repose beneath its branches, in the "Paradise of God."

EPISTLE TO SMYRNA.

LECTURE III.

REVELATION ii. 9.

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, but thou art rich.

THE subject for the present Lecture is the second of the epistles to the Asiatic Churches, addressed by our Lord to the Church of Smyrna.

The character of this epistle is, although with some points of similarity, still materially different from the preceding. In that, the language of reproof was equally prominent with the language of commendation; in this, not a word of reprehension is mingled with the praise.

In the epistle to Ephesus, we beheld the portraiture of the general Church of Christ during the apostolical age; terminating with the life of St. John. In the epistle to Smyrna, we are presented with a view of the primitive Church from the time that the open ministration of the Spirit passed away, until the period when the religion of Christ became the national religion of the Roman empire. In other words, we may consider the Church at Smyrna to have been a type of the general character and state of the Christian Church from the death of St. John, until the reign of Constantine the Great. A period during which the blood of the martyrs, the seed of the Church, was more freely sown than in any period of similar duration in that Church's history; while, our enemies themselves being the judges, the religion of the Redeemer brought forth such fruit, of holiness, and self-denial, and love, as

utterly astonished its opponents, although it did not restrain their cruelty, or convert their hearts.

This will fully justify the language of the epistle, which after opening with a preface, peculiarly appropriate to its contents, is entirely occupied with the commendation of the Church's apparent poverty, but real riches, with predictions of its sufferings, and encouragement under its trials; while it closes with a most blessed and appropriate promise.

First, as regards the beautiful propriety of the preface,—“Unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”* Consider, that our Lord was addressing Himself to a Church, whose members should be called to pass through the deepest waters of affliction, and to suffer unceasingly beneath the iron rod of their persecutors; to hold themselves in daily readiness,

* Revelation ii. 8.

to pour out their blood in the amphitheatre, or to perish at the stake. Could He have presented Himself to them in a character which would more powerfully tend to elevate their hope, to brighten their faith, and to nerve them for the struggles in which they were shortly to bear so glorious, but so fearful a portion ?

I who speak unto thee, says the Saviour, am “the first and the last,” the infinite, the eternal One ; and therefore well able, with all the power of Deity, to carry thee through this mortal strife, and make thee more than conqueror for my name’s sake. But I am also he, “which was dead, and is alive ;” I have therefore been myself once subject to the same sorrows and persecutions as thine own ; I have experienced “the cruel mockings and scourgings” which thou shalt suffer ; I have groaned beneath the tortures of the body, and have bled from very agony of soul. Death

itself, the last great consummation of thy trials, is not unknown to me; I have felt its damps upon my brow, and have hung a lifeless corpse upon the cross, and have been wrapped in the cerements of the sepulchre, for I “was dead;” and I can therefore well be touched with a feeling of every infirmity and pang which assails the dying; but I am now “alive,” to assure thee of the unchangeableness of my protection, and my ability to help and deliver. Take courage, therefore, in thy coming trials; though thine enemies shall prevail against thee even unto death, though after thy death, worms shall destroy thy body, yet in thy flesh thou shalt see God; for thou hast to do with One who “was dead,” to purchase thy reconciliation to God, and is now for ever “alive” at His right hand, to carry thee through every trial and to place thee beside His throne.

After this preface, so brief, and yet

so consolatory, so replete with evidence of our Lord's ability and inclination to save, the epistle thus continues, "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, but thou art rich."

No doubt, in the first instance, this declaration was peculiarly applicable to the Church at Smyrna, but how precisely is it also the testimony which we should have expected would have been borne to the Church of the Redeemer, in general, during her days of deepest anguish! From the time that miraculous influences ceased, until the time that the Christian religion became the state religion of the Roman world, the Church could not but be remarkable for her poverty and destitution; "as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."*

To name with reverence the name of Christ, was in those days sufficient to subject men to obloquy and contempt,

* 2 Corinthians vi. 10.

from which there was no escape. They were driven from lucrative and honourable employments, the stamp of infamy was indelibly fixed upon them, and all reasonable hope of this world's consolations utterly denied them. In those days, brethren, it was something to be a Christian! There were few formal followers; there were probably no indifferent professors of religion then; no man took up the name of Christ, who did not take up with it the cross of Christ, and deny himself, and follow Christ. No man accepted of the opprobrious appellation of a disciple of the crucified Nazarene, unless he was fully prepared to carry it down with him to the abodes of poverty and degradation, and unless he was willing, when the day of tribulation came, to assert his right to the title before kings and rulers, at the price of life itself, for that name's sake.

How highly, then, must this brief, but striking commendation of the Saviour,

have been valued by such men, and at such a season ; “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, but thou art rich.” Poor in this world’s goods, but rich in wealth, more valuable than ever flowed into the treasury of Rome ; rich in the possession of a true and living faith ; rich in all the fruits of the Spirit ; rich in every work of holiness and piety ; and rich in the glorious reversions of eternity. And all this was known, and known with satisfaction and commendation, by their glorified Redeemer.

My poorer brethren, what prevents the same fact from being known by that Redeemer, and the same sentence declared by Him, respecting each individual among yourselves ? He knows the poverty of your worldly circumstances, He knows the difficulty with which many of you, after the utmost efforts of your labour, obtain a scanty and precarious subsistence ; but does He at

the same time know that you are “seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,”* the renewed heart, the altered life, the union with Himself? that you are bearing all outward circumstances with a cheerfulness and contentment which flow from faith within; desirous, above all other things, of a more realising communion with God, a more holy and consistent obedience to Him, and a more abundant entrance into His everlasting kingdom? If so, be at peace, you are not poor; you are not the objects of compassion; nay rather, are you not the objects almost of envy, if such were possible, to the angels of heaven? For when they look upon your names as written in the Lamb’s book of life, and when they ask, as he in the Apocalypse, “And what are these?”† they hear the gracious commendation, Yes, these are

* Matthew vi. 33.

† Revelation vii. 13.

poor, "I know their poverty, but they are rich."

Brethren, the manner in which we estimate poverty and riches, differs most widely from the manner in which that estimate is made, in the eternal mansions.

The only poor, in the sight of God, are they, whatever be their station here, whose poverty is a spiritual poverty; whose souls are empty of the grace of God; whose hearts are destitute, utterly destitute of the love of Christ; whose lives are barren in those works of holiness, and self-denial, and charity, without which the richest professor of Christianity stands as poorer in the sight of the Eternal, than the most destitute object in creation. Tried by this rule, weighed in this balance, how many would be found wanting? How many upon whom at this very moment, while men are envying their wealth, and flattering them for their riches, the great God, who sees the heart, is pronouncing

precisely the reverse of the sentence of the text, I know thy wealth, but thou art really poor, poor in faith, poor in hope, poor in love, poor in holiness, poor in every thing, which the hand of death will not shortly wring from thy grasp, and scatter to the winds.

We all feel for the houseless and destitute; the poor, in this world's goods; and it is well we should so feel. But have we not still greater cause to pity those who are, far more emphatically, the really houseless and destitute, who have no mansion preparing for them in our Father's house; no clothing which on the great day shall avail to cover their unrighteousness; no interest in Him, who is our life, our all! Especially, shall we not commiserate the poor rich? Surely they ought to be among the first and chiefest objects of our compassion. The poor rich! the men whose treasury is overflowing, but whose hearts are empty! whose tables are

covered with every luxury, but whose souls are starving ! The men who are daily saying to themselves, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry,"* and who yet, when the signal for departure comes, when the Bridegroom's cry is heard, will be found more utterly impoverished, more entirely destitute, than ever were the foolish virgins when hopelessly appealing to their wiser sisters, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." If we at this moment address any such, most earnestly would we urge them to look forward in imagination to the hour, which "will try every man's work," and every man's wealth, "of what sort it is." Have you reason to believe that yours will stand the test? that this world's wealth and this world's riches will profit you upon a dying bed? Then, indeed, we have nothing to say; you

* Luke xii. 19.

cannot possibly do better than to live to both worlds, and enjoy both worlds; but if they will not—if an exclusive attachment to the things of time is destructive of our preparation for eternity—if “the friendship of the world is enmity with God”—if the devotion of the heart to its interests, its luxuries, and its pleasures is treason and ingratitude to God—if the wealth on which your soul is chiefly fixed, is not the wealth that can outlive time, and profit you in eternity—and if the riches to which you look are not the unsearchable riches of Christ—then are you poor indeed; then are you taking “in exchange for your soul,”* that of which a week, a day, an hour, may dispossess you. You may be conscious of no such bargain, you may, and probably will, revolt at the very idea of such an exchange, but it is our Lord’s own expression, and unquestionably true; “for what shall a man give in

* Matthew xvi. 26.

exchange for his soul?" And when the summons comes, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee," you will be convinced of it, in a manner and with an emphasis, which no living tongue, on this side eternity, can venture to portray.

The epistle before us thus continues :
"I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer ; behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried ; and ye shall have tribulation ten days."*
In these words there are two distinct declarations, that the great accuser of the brethren should be extremely active in his trials and persecutions of the followers of our Lord ; and then, as a close to all their troubles, that they should suffer one great tribulation for "ten days," which, in prophetic language, signifies ten years.

* Revelation ii. 9, 10.

Now it is remarkable, that while we have no account of the Church of Smyrna suffering under any persecution of such duration, the readers of church history will be aware that nothing could more accurately describe the state of the primitive Church in general, during the period of which we have considered the Church of Smyrna to be a type, than this prophecy. For after Satan had, during ten different persecutions of the infant Church in different parts of the Roman empire, which are enumerated by historians, manifested the extremity of his hostility and rancour, he closed the whole, by the great and sweeping persecution in the reign of Dioclesian, at the close of the third, and beginning of the fourth century, which persecution is stated to have existed, with more or less intensity, during ten years.

Deeply interesting would it be, if the nature of these discourses admitted of it, to give some details of the manner

in which this declaration of our Lord was fulfilled; of the appalling efforts of the Powers of darkness to overwhelm the infant Church, and of the divine aid which enabled the holy army of martyrs to persevere even unto the death, "not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection."* Obviously impossible as it is, to do this at any length, we cannot refrain from selecting one of the many astonishing instances, exhibited at this period, of the influence of divine grace in enabling these Christian heroes to triumph over the last enemy, as evidenced in the closing scene of the martyr Polycarp, one of the noblest, as well as earliest, victims who adorned that period of the Church's history of which we speak; this holy man, who in pursuance of our Lord's direction, "when they persecute you in one city, flee unto another,"† had avoided the extremity of persecution, until he found that he could

* Hebrews xi. 35.

† Matthew x. 23.

no longer be concealed, without injury to his friends, and to the cause of his Redeemer, upon being told that his enemies were in the house, but that there was still time and opportunity to escape, refused, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." After they who were sent to apprehend him had arrested him, he requested one hour for prayer, which being granted, he "prayed standing in the presence of his enemies;" and, says the narrator, himself an eye-witness, "so full was he of the grace of God, that he could not cease speaking for two hours, during which time he made earnest petitions for all whom he had ever known, small and great, noble and vulgar, and of the whole Church of Christ throughout the world." Upon being brought before the tribunal, the Proconsul respecting his dignities,—for he was a Bishop of the Church,—and his advanced age—for he was more than eighty,—and desirous to save him, urged

him, saying, "Swear, and I will release thee: reproach Christ." Polycarp answered, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he hath never wronged me, and how can I blaspheme my King who hath saved me?" The Proconsul, judging his efforts unavailing, sent the herald to proclaim in the midst of the assembly, "Polycarp hath professed himself a Christian." At that hated name the multitude, both of Gentiles and Jews, unanimously shouted that he should be burnt alive. "The business," continues the narrator, "was executed with all possible speed, for the people immediately gathered fuel from the workshops and baths, in which employment the Jews distinguished themselves with their usual malice." A remarkable fulfilment of the prophecy before us, that those who said "They were Jews and were not," "all were not Israel who were of Israel," should, as "the synagogue of Satan," take an

active part in the persecutions of the Christian Church during this period.

“As soon as the fire was prepared, Polycarp stripped off his clothes and loosed his girdle; but when they were about to fasten him to the stake, he said, Let me remain as I am, for He who giveth me strength to sustain the fire, will enable me also, without your securing me with nails, to remain unmoved in the fire;” upon which they bound him, without nailing him; and he, putting his hands behind him, and being bound as a distinguished ram selected from the great flock, a burnt offering acceptable to God Almighty, said, “O, Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have attained the knowledge of Thee; O God of angels, principalities, and of all creation, and of all the just who live in Thy sight, I bless Thee that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day, and of this hour, to receive my por-

tion in the number of the martyrs in the cup of Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body; among whom may I be presented before Thee this day as a sacrifice well savoured and acceptable, which Thou, the faithful and true God, hast prepared, promised beforehand, and fulfilled accordingly. Wherefore, I praise Thee for all these things; I bless Thee, I glorify Thee by the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy well beloved Son, through whom, with Him in the Holy Scriptures, be glory to Thee both now and for ever." The narrator of this deeply interesting history was Irenæus, the intimate friend and disciple of Polycarp, and, as we have mentioned, an eye-witness of the scene which he describes. He thus concludes the letter which contains the foregoing account: "He, Polycarp, was apprehended by Herod, under Philip, the Trallian Pontifex, Statius Quadratus being Proconsul,

—but Jesus Christ reigning for ever, to whom be glory, honour, majesty, an eternal throne from age to age.”* How striking an allusion to those very characteristics of our Lord with which He ushered in the epistle we have been considering, His eternity and power, “the first and the last, which was dead and is alive” for evermore. When we consider that the writer of this account of the martyrdom of Polycarp had been deprived of his best earthly counsellor, teacher, and friend, how natural was the reference which his mind thus made, from things temporal to things eternal, from the beings of a day, to Him that inhabiteth eternity. He had seen Polycarp, the great and good, expire in agony at the command of his persecutors. Herod was his enemy, Philip was his enemy, the Proconsul was his enemy; but they were all changing, transitory beings, like himself; a few short years, and their “little brief authority” would have

* Abridged from Milner's “Church History.”

gone down with them into the grave ; a few short years, and the throne of the Proconsul would be crumbled into dust. What a relief must it have been to the mind of this believer to turn from his enemies to his friend ; from Statius Quadratus, the ruler of a day, to “ Jesus Christ, reigning for ever, an eternal throne from age to age.”

Brethren, may his consolation be our own, that our life, and heart, and hopes, are in the hands of One who knows no change, and who is the “ dwelling-place” of His people, from everlasting to everlasting ; “ Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”*

The epistle concludes with this most blessed promise ; “ Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”† What that death is, we are most plainly told in the 20th chapter of the book from

* Hebrews xiii. 8.

† Revelation ii. 10, 11.

which the text is taken, where we read, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." It is, indeed, the death of deaths; the eternal condemnation of the soul. From the apprehension of this, every true servant of God is most fully and entirely released. Great and blessed privilege, to know that the fires of eternity are as harmless to you as those of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace were to the Jewish youths who walked uninjured amid their flames; to know that the undying worm shall never fix his fang upon your conscience, but that for ever and for ever "the great gulph,"* the impassable abyss, shall stand between you and all suffering—between you and all sorrow—between you and all sin.

There is, however, yet more than this exemption from evil, in the promise of your Lord, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a

* Luke xvi. 26.

crown of life." Who can worthily speak of such a promise! who can describe the lustre of such a crown! Age after age shall pass away, and every jewel in that crown shall be as bright, even when unnumbered ages have gone by, as at the first hour when the hand of your Redeemer shall place its radiant circle upon your brow. For that "crown of life" is to all who wear it, a crown of immortality and glory, "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."*

Brethren, are you seriously engaged in the conflict of which this is the reward? Are you faithfully, perseveringly, earnestly, running the race, in which this is the prize? Are you wrestling in that fearful struggle with our spiritual enemies, the event of which is indeed, wo to the vanquished, death, everlasting death, even the second death, but the crown of life to him that overcometh? Remember that nothing less

* 1 Peter i. 4.

than this constant conflict, struggle, race, can obtain the prize. All else is trifling, folly, madness; it requires the whole man, the whole heart; all your exertions, all your efforts, all your prayers. And not for a day, or year, but for life, for your whole life, without cessation, without intermission. "Be thou faithful unto death," or every claim to the crown of life is forfeited. "But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Our fidelity unto death, though it must and will require our every effort, labour, and prayer, is not the fruit of any, or of all these exertions, but is the pledged and purchased gift of our Redeemer, His own promise, His own work, His own victory. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."†

* 1 Corinthians xv. 57.

† 1 Corinthians xv. 58.

EPISTLE TO PERGAMOS.

LECTURE IV.

REVELATION ii. 17.

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.

IN the last discourse we contemplated the Church of Christ during one of the most interesting periods that it has ever known, viz. during those peculiarly trying centuries when its members were poor in this world's advantages, but rich unto God; "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich;"* when they were called to endure the ten

* Revelation ii. 9.

days of tribulation under the Pagan persecutors,- but were "found faithful unto death," and so put on the crown of life.

This state of apparent depression, but of real prosperity, continued until the three first centuries had passed away, and the religion of the Redeemer began to emerge from its obscurity; to be patronised by the great and noble; to reckon princes among its proselytes, and Constantine, the Emperor of the Roman world, as its acknowledged head.

As it too often is with individuals, so it is with the Church at large. The warm and sunny day draws out the adder. Christians who in a preceding age had been able to rejoice in their poverty and tribulation, and even to be thankful that to them it was given not only to believe on him, but also to suffer, for the sake of Christ,* now became anxious only for this world's wealth and its advantages; so that, instead of the holy, self-denying lives

* See Philipians i. 29.

of the earlier converts, were to be seen the compromising, sensual habits of the mere worldling, in the garb and under the title of the followers of the Crucified.

It is of this church-state that we believe the Church of Pergamos to have been the type; at least we may assert that the instructions and reproofs addressed in the first instance to her, were peculiarly appropriate to the great body of the Christian Church, from the days of Constantine, until the period when the Popes first began to assume temporal power, and by their usurpations, enormities, and tyranny, to give, as we shall see in the next epistle, an entirely new character to the Christian world.

In our last discourse, we remarked how peculiarly appropriate the preface was to the nature of the instructions and warnings which were to follow.

Observe the same beauty of propriety in the epistle which comes before us this day.

“To the angel of the Church in Pergamos write; these things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.”* When our Lord was about to use only the language of commendation and encouragement He referred only to those of His attributes from which encouragement and comfort could be deduced, His eternity and all-sufficiency. In the present epistle, so full of reprehension, He describes Himself in his judicial character, as bearing not the sword in vain, equally ready to punish as to defend; to destroy, as to save.

The epistle thus continues, “I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is.”† No sooner had imperial Rome become Christian, than from its great temporal power and wealth, which although upon the wane, were still considerable, it became at once the head of the Christian world; and therefore might be termed pre-

* Revelation ii. 12.

† Ibid. ii. 13.

eminently the seat of Christianity. To this depraved and profligate city evident allusion is made in the verse I have just read.

It was there, even in the imperial city, that our Lord now beheld His true Church dwelling in the very centre of iniquity surrounded by those who were indeed the bondsmen of Satan, some who were still in open Paganism; others nominally Christians, but without the love of Christ in their hearts; and many, like the "mixed multitude," that accompanied the children of Israel out of Egypt, who had given in their adhesion to the new religion, and were following in the wake of the court, hoping to derive temporal advantages from their agreement with those who had the power of dispensing them. Yet, even in Rome itself, the very seat of Satan, there were some who might indeed be called "the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked

and perverse nation, among whom they shone as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life," and to whom therefore the Saviour could say in the language of commendation, "Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you where Satan dwelleth." As there is no mention of any martyr of the name of Antipas, either in the Church of Pergamos, or during that church-state of which Pergamos was the type, it seems probable that he is only mentioned as a general expression for the martyrs and confessors who had adorned the preceding church-state. And this is much corroborated by the name being entirely omitted in the Syriac and Arabic versions. Our Lord's declaration was therefore in effect that they had passed through the era of the martyrs, and now in the time of outward prosperity which

had succeeded, the true Church, the invisible Church of the Redeemer, was as firm, as faithful, as she had ever been; the gates of hell being equally unable to prevail against her, amidst the allurements of prosperity, as amidst the trials and severities of persecution.

It is well to mark the personal lesson which all may gather, either of reproof or encouragement, from such a declaration as this. Are there none among us, who justify our coldness and deadness in the things of God, by the outward circumstances in which we are, by Providence, so peculiarly placed? None, the language of whose hearts is of this nature? "It is comparatively easy for some men to be religious; they dwell in a religious society, their friends are religious, their early habits were religious, their education has been religious, every thing is favourable to them; they have little to distract their thoughts, to alienate their hearts from these high

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subjects ; but for me, occupied as I am entirely in worldly business, dwelling among those who, like myself, are struggling to get forward in life, how can the same degree of self-devotion and religious observance be looked for at my hands ?” Or again, “standing as I do in a higher and more prominent station than many, surrounded by all the attractions of wealth, or luxury, or rank, it is impossible. God cannot and will not expect the same from all ; He must make some allowances for peculiar positions in society and peculiar temptations, and no doubt His mercy will prevail against His justice in cases such as mine ?” Brethren, we beseech you, not to suffer yourselves to be deluded by this most common, because most successful, fallacy. Rank, station, business, education, wealth, poverty, are all extraneous and adventitious circumstances, which cannot be taken into the account when you stand before the bar of God. The one in-

quiry then will be, did you live to God, or to yourself? to the world to come or to the world around you, during your state of probation while on earth? all other inquiries, all reference to past difficulties, allowance for past peculiarities, of rank and station, all will be, and must be, excluded. There is no respect of persons with God; He judges the rich and the poor, the noble and the peasant, by the same laws. The only distinction known to Him is that to which He Himself has laid down, when he declared by the mouth of His prophet, that He would “discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.”* Had it been otherwise, I put it to your own consideration, could our Lord have so positively declared, that the difficulties of the rich man’s salvation were incalculably increased by his riches? for is it not evident that if proportionate allowances

* Malachi iii. 18.

accompanied these earthly distinctions, it would be impossible to show that the strait gate was straiter, or the narrow way narrower, or the kingdom of heaven more difficult of entrance, to the rich, than to the poor ?

The verse before us, however, is alone sufficient to demonstrate that no such allowances will be made, because it proves that none such can fairly be demanded. It is vain for any one to declare, the worldliness of my friends, the vanity of my family, the ungodliness of my neighbours, the thoughtlessness of my children, or, in general, my situation in society, the character of those among whom I dwell, and not my own inclination have made me what I am. There is an absurdity on the very face of such a plea, when tendered to that Almighty Being, who here declared that He had those who held fast His name, and never denied his faith, although they dwelt among sinners of so deep a

dye, that our Lord does not scruple to declare, that the residence of the true Church of the Redeemer was at that period in the very "seat of Satan."

No, brethren, if we would really know ourselves, these excuses must be put aside, these disguises stript off, and we must remember, that it is not what we might have been, or under other, and those imaginary circumstances, should have been, that God considers us. He sees us simply as we are, and in the last great day, according to that, shall we be sentenced. He who shall come to be our Judge, well knowing that the greatest abundance of wealth did not keep Abraham back from following God; that all the wisdom of the Egyptians did not encumber Moses in running the heavenly race; that even an earthly crown, and that, a most anxious and disturbed one, did not prevent David from striving for, and obtaining, a crown of immortality and glory; how can He

then reasonably be expected in any other case, to make allowances in favour of the allurements of wealth, the temptations of intellect, or the hindrances of rank, station, or employment ?

We will readily acknowledge that our fellow-men may, and ought, to make every allowance in judging of us, because although they know their own temptations, they know not the strength and peculiarity of ours ; but we must expect nothing like this from God. He has confirmed both His promises and His threatenings, and has established the one, the only way to the Father, through the blood of Christ, by two immutable things, His word and His oath, and one jot or one tittle shall never pass away from these, till all be fulfilled. If we seek God through Him who is "the way, the truth and the life," with a holy resolution to walk as He walked, and to sacrifice every sin at His bidding, we shall not seek in vain. If we neglect this, we

may rest assured that business, wealth, rank, station, poverty, are words that, at the bar of God, we shall be unable to utter; and are excuses which, if we even had the audacity to plead, God would utterly despise.

But while there is warning, there is also encouragement in the fact of some of Christ's most faithful servants dwelling in Satan's seat.

It is a peculiar comfort to those among you, who, though placed by Providence amidst the overflowings of ungodliness, are faithfully and sincerely striving to keep yourselves "unspotted from the world."* Let the fact before you convince you that it is possible, by the upholding power of God's free Spirit, even amidst the most destructive example, under the most blighting influence, even where the prince of this world reigneth; if such a situation be not the object of your choice, but the effect of necessity, to "hold

* James i. 27.

fast the name of Christ, and not to deny his faith." But then the path of duty must be clear to you; it must be plain that Providence, and not avarice, that necessity, not ambition, has fixed you where you are. For it will invariably be found, whenever the children of God place themselves unnecessarily in temptation, that if the Spirit of God accompanies them at all, it will be to make their expected advantages, as He did to His people of old, "pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides, to vex them in the land wherein they dwell."*

We continue the epistle, that we may learn the manner in which our Lord addressed those members of His Church, who were already deeply injured by that familiarity with worldly affluence and distinction to which we have referred. "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there, them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak

* Numbers xxxiii. 55.

to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication ; so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." The first charge here brought against the visible Church of the Redeemer is, that there were those within its pale, who imitated the sin of Balaam, viz : casting a stumbling-block in the way of God's people, which we find from the 31st chapter of the book of Numbers, was the peculiar sin of that unhappy man.

This, then, was the conduct which Christians in those days of outward church prosperity were beginning to imitate. We know not that a greater, or better, test can be offered, of the spirituality of a church, or the religion of any individual member of it, than the feeling with which we view those points in our own conduct, which may be injurious to our fellow-Christians, which

may act as stumbling-blocks in the path of our neighbours, or tend to prevent the growth of religion and divine grace in their hearts. How clearly, and how instructively has St. Paul illustrated the nature of this peculiar sin in the 8th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. He has there been declaring his opinion upon the propriety of a Christian eating meat, which has been offered in sacrifice unto idols, apparently a point of great difficulty to the tender consciences of those days. He says at once, that in reality, "an idol is nothing in the world,"* i. e. nothing but the mere stone or log out of which it is carved, and therefore that the meat which has been offered to it may be eaten with perfect impunity, by those whose consciences are sufficiently strong to view the subject in this light. But then, in the true feeling of Christian charity and consideration for others, he immediately adds, "But take heed,

* 1 Corinthians viii. 4.

lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”*

How beautiful an instance of that love for the souls of others, which invariably springs from a due sense of the value of our own. What a test of the state of true, vital Christianity in our hearts. Now, for a moment, brethren, let us pause, and apply this test. Did you ever, in the whole course of your life,

* 1 Corinthians viii. 9—13.

forego one apparent advantage, or deny yourself one questionable pleasure, or abstain from any doubtful action, from the fear that a contrary course would cast a stumbling-block in the path of some weak brother, who, from a morbid tenderness of conscience fears that to be evil, which you in your stronger knowledge believe to be innocent? How far are the very best of us, if we know not where to look for such instances in our own lives and conversation, how very far from the religion of the Bible; how widely removed in all the best and higher feelings, viz: those of forbearance and love, from that holy and self-denying apostle, who could unhesitatingly declare, "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

But it was not only for casting stumbling-blocks in the way of God's people that our Lord condemned the Church to

which this epistle is addressed, but for a sin, prevalent in every age, and perhaps seldom more prevalent than at the present time. "Thou hast them," says our Lord, "that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." It appears that the Nicolaitanes were the Antinomians of those days; men who held the truth in ungodliness, the very worst and most dangerous enemies which the religion of the Redeemer has ever encountered; for these are they who wound her in the house of her friends.

Perhaps we do not at the present moment address an individual who would acknowledge himself deserving of the appellation; not one who would declare himself an Antinomian. Yet, brethren, we fear that many must be classed among the number, who would not rank themselves there. Every one is really and practically an Antinomian, who, professing a true and scriptural faith in

the Lord Jesus Christ, is not careful to regulate his daily conduct by that law of God, which has ever been, and shall ever be, the true believer's rule of life, and without a holy and consistent obedience to which, the most correct faith is dead.

Turn we now to the glorious promise, with which the epistle before us concludes, "To him that overcometh," or, as it may fairly be rendered, to him that is overcoming, "will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." Mark first, brethren, among these wonderful provisions for the conquering Christian, the "hidden manna;" probably a reference to that portion of the heavenly food of the Israelites in the wilderness, which was commanded by God to be hidden in a golden vessel in the Tabernacle, as an everlasting memorial of

God's mercy, and as a very striking type of that Saviour, who declared, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven."* In the hidden manna, then, promised by our Lord as the bread of life for the support and nourishment of His conflicting and overcoming people, we discern the promise of Himself, even that crucified Redeemer, who said, "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."† This is the food, without which, in the very midst of earthly abundance, our souls will languish and die. If God's word be true, there is none other from which we can draw nourishment and life; for did not our Lord Himself declare, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you?" Upon Him, then, we must learn to feed

* John vi. 51.

† John vi. 54, 55.

daily and hourly, by a true and living faith,—upon the blood of the Lamb, which is carried up to the mercy-seat for pardon and peace,—upon the righteousness of the Redeemer, for our everlasting acceptance before the throne,—upon His grace and strength, for support, amidst dangerous temptations, difficult duties, and painful dispensations. Our language must be, like his of old, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength;” in Him, and in Him alone, whom the world neither sees nor knows, have I the “hidden manna,” “the bread of life.”

Again, the second promise of the text requires our attention. “To him that overcometh will I give a white stone.”* It is generally supposed by commentators that this refers to an ancient judicial custom of dropping a black stone into an urn when it was intended to condemn, and a white stone when the prisoner

* Ψηφον λευκον, probably the *tessera hospitalis* of the Latins, and the *συμβολον ξενικον* of the Greeks.

was acquitted. But this is an act so distinct from that described in the scripture before us, "I will give him a white stone," that we are disposed to agree with those who think it refers rather to a custom of a very different kind,* and not unknown to the classical reader, according, with beautiful propriety, to the circumstances before us. In primitive times, when travelling was rendered difficult from the want of places of public entertainment, hospitality was exercised by private individuals to a very great extent, of which indeed we find frequent traces in all history, and in none more than the Old Testament. Persons who had partaken of this hospitality, and those who practised it, frequently contracted habits of friendship and regard for each other; and it became a well established custom, both among the Greeks and Romans, to provide their guests with some particular mark, which was handed down from

* See Horne's Introduction.

father to son, and insured hospitality and kind treatment whenever it was presented. This mark was usually a small stone or pebble cut in half, and upon the halves of which, the host and the guest mutually inscribed their names, and then interchanged them with each other. The production of this tessera was quite sufficient to insure friendship for themselves or their descendants, whenever they travelled again in the same direction; while it is evident that these stones required to be privately kept, and the name written upon them carefully concealed, lest others should obtain the privileges, instead of the person for whom they were intended. How natural, then, is the allusion to this custom in the words of the text, "I will give him to eat of the hidden manna;" and having done so, having made him partaker of my hospitality, having recognised him as my guest, my friend, "I will present him with the white stone, and in the stone

a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." I will give him a pledge of my friendship, sacred and inviolable, known only to himself.

Blessed pledge of the Christian! Are there moments, even to him who is overcoming, when his soul is much discouraged because of the way; when he is wearied and worn in the journey of life, and would gladly seek for food, and shelter, and repose, let him remember the pledge which his Lord has given him; let him call upon Him, who has already in many a former trial nourished and supported him, who has given him to eat of the hidden manna, who has given him to drink of that water of which they who drink shall never thirst; let him think of the pledge which he has received, and never for one moment be cast down. Would a mortal man like ourselves have been ashamed to look upon his given pledge, and not to have

treated its possessor with attention and regard, and shall the God of all the world do less? No; be assured that He will not, cannot fail you. He who has succoured, will succour; "the Lord has provided, the Lord will provide;" and though heaven and earth fail, no good thing shall fail of all that He has promised and secured to his believing and obeying people.

But there is still another peculiarity, which you may not have observed, and which seems to pervade the remarkable promise before us, and this is, its secrecy. The name inscribed upon the stone by our Lord was, as we are distinctly told, to be known only to him that possessed it—the white stone could be appreciated only by him whose necessities it would afford the means of supplying—the manna was hidden from all, but those who fed upon it. Surely, then, some lesson is to be taught us by so remarkable a peculiarity. We

believe it to be this, that true religion is not the noisy, public thing which too many make it, but that the life of the true Christian is in all ages to be a hidden life; its fruits indeed visible, by holiness, and long suffering, and love, and every Christian grace, but the life itself veiled in the transactions between God and the soul, as the apostle to the Colossians expresses it, when he says, "Your life is hid with Christ in God."*

Would you, then, know whether your life be the spiritual life of God's dear children? Mark whether it possesses this essential qualification. Every other symptom of religion may be counterfeited by the mere moralist, or the hypocrite, or the formalist; the hidden life of the Christian never can, for it is known only to him that possesses it. Would you ascertain whether it be yours, take this simple method of determin-

* Colossians iii. 3.

ing it ; subtract from life, first, all the hours spent in necessary occupations, and in unnecessary idleness ; then, those which, as on this hallowed day, you devote very properly to public religious observances ; and having subtracted these, observe what remains :—see how much has been secretly dedicated to God ; just by so much, is yours the hidden life of the Christian.

How many in this assemblage at this moment are there who stand self-condemned ; whose consciences have already whispered, If this be indeed the stamp of vital religion, then does my religion forfeit all claim to it. When I have made these great deductions, there is absolutely nothing left. All is swallowed up in the engagements of time ; nothing has been reserved for eternity. All, even of my Christian duties, are spread before the world ; nothing hid with Christ in God ! Do you, then, never in the privacy of your

chamber, pour out your heart before the throne of grace? do you never secretly feed upon the hidden manna, as conveyed to you in God's revealed word? never dwell with delight, and thanksgiving, and praise, upon that pledge of your Saviour's friendship, the gift of His holy Spirit, the "earnest of your future inheritance?"* never, when alone, think, or read, or meditate upon divine truth? Then, indeed, we greatly fear that you have to question whether yours is the religion of the heart, the Christianity of the Bible, the offering which God will not despise.

Lastly, brethren, one word of encouragement to you, who find upon self-examination, that these features of the true life of a Christian are, at least in some degree, alas! how small even in the best of men, visible in your own. Yours is now a hidden life, possessing temptations and sorrows, of which

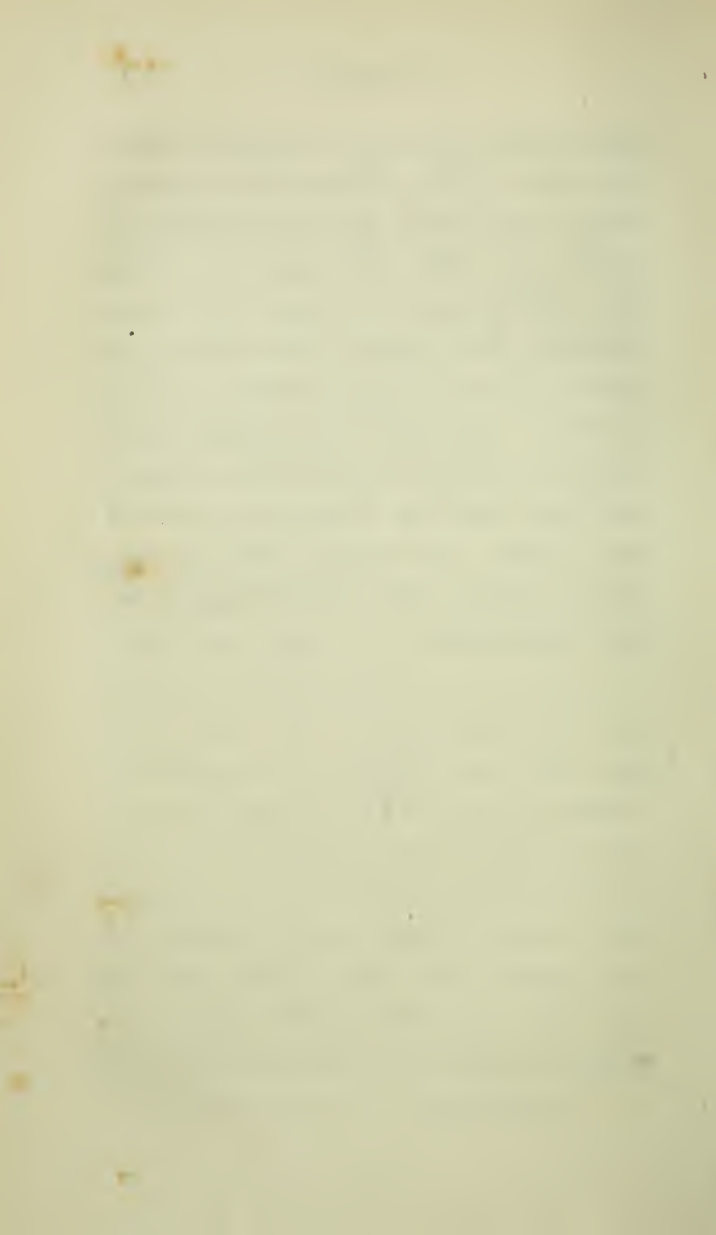
* Ephesians i. 14.

none partake, as well as joys with which a stranger intermeddleth not. The happiest portion of your day, short though it be, is spent in secret communion with Him, "whom not having seen, you love,"* and known only to Him are those blessed sources of all your spiritual comfort and your joy. It is intended to be so now; but take comfort from the reflection that this will not always be the case. The day is not far distant, when assembled worlds will behold the men who meditated and prayed in secret, who were content to be as the dust of the earth, and the offscouring of all things; but then will they no longer be the "Lord's hidden ones;"† but shining, like stars, in the kingdom of their Father, and swelling the ranks of those glorified spirits who for ever shall attest the triumphs of the Lamb. Then will you, who are now feeding upon the hidden manna,

* 1 Peter i. 8.

† Psalm lxxxiii. 3.

feast openly with your Redeemer upon the tree of life. Then will the new name, now known only to yourself, be avowed by Him who gave it, when He confesses you to be, as He has declared, His friend, His child, His guest. Then will the pledge of His promised hospitality be abundantly and for ever redeemed, when the everlasting doors shall be lifted up, and you shall enter, a welcome and an honoured inmate, into the kingdom and joy of your Lord.



EPISTLE TO THYATIRA.



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LECTURE V.

REVELATION ii. 28.

And I will give him the morning star.

THE epistle of which we are now about to treat, is addressed to the Church of Thyatira, and will present us with a view of the Church of Christ, differing most widely from those which have preceded it.

We have, in the former discourses, beheld the visible Church of the Redeemer, as portrayed in the first epistle, in her apostolical purity; in the second, in her faithfulness, devotedness, and poverty, during the era of the martyrs;

in the third, as suffering from the temptation of outward prosperity, when Christianity had become the dominant religion of the Roman world; but in the present epistle we shall see her, as exposed to greater perils than had ever yet assailed her, arising from a far more dangerous source, even from the prevalency of internal error; and from the ruinous effects of false teaching within herself.

The preface of this epistle is remarkable, as in the preceding cases, for its beautiful appropriateness to the lessons which are to follow. "These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass."*

The great and glorified Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, is about to speak of the errors and misconduct of His people, and he therefore reminds them that there is nothing which can

* Revelation ii. 18.

escape His eyes of fire ; “ all things,” as the apostle says, “ being naked and opened unto Him with whom we have to do.” But then he is also about to threaten destruction to the followers of Jezebel, “ I will kill her children with death,”* and therefore He reminds them of His “ feet of brass,” with which He had already trampled upon the old serpent, and with which he will assuredly tread down every enemy, as among that serpent’s brood.

We proceed to the substance of the epistle itself ; but before we do so, we would call your attention to one feature common to all the seven epistles, except the last. It is this, that however grievous be the errors of the particular period to which our Lord refers ; however low the spirituality of that Church’s state of which He speaks, there is invariably a portion of the epistle addressed to the true believer ; to the real people of God, who

* Revelation ii. 23.

appear to have escaped the prevailing errors, or sins of the days in which they live; those, in short, whom the apostle describes under the title of “a remnant according to the election of grace;” those who were “kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.”

Accordingly, in the Scripture now under examination, our Lord begins by commending the little flock, before He proceeds to bring forward His heavy charge against the Church in general: “I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”

There are few things more consolatory to the Christian, than to find, that thus, even in the darkest ages of the Church, the little flock of the Redeemer held on the even tenor of their way, in humble, holy obedience to their Lord; not deterred in one age by the terrors of martyrdom, nor in the next by the

allurements of prosperity, nor in this, by the false teaching of the Papacy, but going on "from strength to strength," until "every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."*

And what are the peculiar features, for which on the present occasion, the Saviour commends this little flock? Brethren, it is well worth your observation to notice them; they are wholly practical. It is not for the great depth of their Christian experience, their vast attainments in spiritual knowledge, but simply and entirely for their practical holiness, and their obedience; their "works," their "service," their "patience," their "love," are the points of character particularly selected by Christ Himself. Their "faith," no doubt, also finds a place, lest it should be said that the other graces sprang not from this, the only root; but how evident

* Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

is it from the whole tenor of the commendation, and that not merely in this, but in every one of the epistles, that the faith which is not continually bringing forth its fruits of patience, and holiness, and habitual and progressive sanctification of soul, is nothing worth. We say progressive, for you will observe how prominent a portion of the commendation that characteristic obtains, "I know thy works, and the last to be more than the first."

We often feel that the great deficiency in the Christian teaching of the present day is, that it is not sufficiently practical. Your ministers are for ever establishing principles, and they are compelled to do so, because there is so much of scriptural error afloat in the world, that they are afraid of building up the superstructure upon a false foundation. But remember that of "faith, hope, and charity, these three," the greatest is, and ever must be, charity.

“Show me thy faith without thy works,” says St. James, “and I will show thee my faith by my works.” And wisely did he say so, for the eye of man can see no other faith, and the eye of God will see none other, but that which “worketh by love.”* Examine, then, yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, and determine this, not by your frames, and feelings, and professions, but simply by your fruits, by your “service” to God, as our Lord denominates it. What are you doing for God? What is there practical in your religion? What in the way of charity? What in the way of self-denial? What in the way of patience and holiness? What in the way of habitual, close and intimate secret communion with Himself? How many, alas! are there, who have attained in the present day to perfectly correct notions in religion, but have gone not a single step beyond. The world sees them

* Galatians v. 6.

just as worldly ; Satan sees them just as carnal ; self sees them just as selfish, as any other of their respective votaries.

Try yourselves, then, by these criterions which we have mentioned, and ascertain before another hour of life has passed away, whether your religion is a practical thing ; whether, therefore, you are in heart and soul among that little flock, on whom your Lord pronounced His benediction. Examine yourself even by the single test which our Lord in this passage has placed before you. Can it be truly said of you, that your “last works are more than the first?” Is Christianity a growing principle within your heart? A man seldom rises above his principles ; as his principles are, so is the man. Is Christianity, then, a principle, and a growing principle? Is your present hatred of sin greater, your avoidance of it more determined and decisive now, than at any

former period? Are your love to the Saviour, and your ardent desire to be conformed to His image, stronger now than at any previous time? Is every grace of the Christian life, are your charity, your patience, your self-denial, your obedience, your prayerfulness, all on the increase? These are the unerring features of God's children; wanting these, you may still possess much resemblance, but we fear you have no relationship. Progress is that family likeness without which no single child of God was ever found; without which not an individual of Christ's redeemed family ever yet passed from its school of trial upon earth, into the happy and rejoicing society of the many mansions of His father's house, the Christian's home. Your last works must be more than your first, or it is a fearful evidence that the principle of religion is dead within your bosom.

In continuing the epistle before us,

we shall find one of the most corroborative arguments in favour of the view which we have been led to take of the typical or prospective nature of these remarkable portions of Holy Writ, which they contain.

“Notwithstanding,” says our Lord, “I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman, Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”

That any individual of this name and character ever existed in the Church of Thyatira, there is no record in any history of the Church of Christ. But to you who have marked the progress of the Christian Church, as typified by the preceding epistles, there will not be the slightest difficulty in ascertaining the antitype of this spiritual Jezebel.

We have, as we have before observed, now arrived at that period when the Pa-

pany was beginning to assume temporal power, laying claim to supremacy, and adopting the title of God's vicegerent upon earth; asserting the infallibility of the Pope, the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacrament, and oppressing, and misleading, and finally persecuting, the true Church of the Redeemer.

Under the type of Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, king of Israel, the Popedom, then, is most plainly pointed out. Observe only for a moment, how many features there were in common. Jezebel was the daughter of a Pagan prince; so Papal Rome has been most distinctly proved, from the similarity of her rites and ceremonies, to be the daughter of Pagan Rome. Jezebel was a queen; so has the Romish Church ever declared herself; and under this character she is made the subject of a remarkable prophecy in the 17th chapter of the Revelation, where she is described as "the woman, arrayed in purple and scarlet

colour, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls," "and drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus," and carried by the beast "with the seven heads." While as if even this were not sufficiently plain to designate her, the apostle himself adds, "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth." Surely the symbolical language of prophecy never contained a plainer sentence, than when it thus identified the seat of this woman of blood, with the city of the seven hills, first Pagan and then Papal Rome.

Our Lord declares that this spiritual Jezebel called herself a prophetess, and taught and seduced her "servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols." How distinctly the Church of Rome proclaimed herself a prophetess, let the well-known dogma of the Papacy, "The Church, the only true interpreter of scripture,"

most plainly tell. While the fact of the leading the servants of Christ into spiritual fornication, by teaching them to offer their petitions to the Virgin Mother, and to every saint of God, instead of the one only Object of prayer, and the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, is too obvious to need a comment. While, that the adoration of images, accompanied even by the most favourable interpretation which can be assigned it, viz. that the symbol is not worshipped, but merely the object which is symbolised, is still regarded as idolatry, by that God who will never give his glory to another, both scripture and Church history abundantly establish. Hear only a short extract from the very remarkable Protest, which was signed by three hundred and thirty-eight bishops, and was addressed to the reigning pope about the middle of the eighth century, and consequently during that period upon which we are now

commenting. The occasion of this Protest was a bull issued by the reigning pontiff to excommunicate all those who should remove, or speak contemptuously of images; and this is the indignant language of those spiritually enlightened men who believed the image worship of the Papacy to be merely idolatry in disguise. "Jesus Christ," say they, "hath delivered us from idolatry, and hath taught us to adore Him in spirit and in truth. But the Devil, not being able to endure the beauty of the Church, hath insensibly brought back idolatry, under the appearance of Christianity; persuading men to worship the creature, and to take for God a work to which they give the name of Jesus Christ."*

It is an evil and bitter thing for the present generation, that errors such as these are so lightly thought of; and that a religion which has done more to blind men's eyes and to harden men's

* Milner's Church History, III. 162.

hearts to the peculiar doctrines of grace, than any other which holds the great and vital truths of Christianity, should now be looked at, if not with complacency, still with indifference, and be spoken of as distinguished from our own, merely by some minute shades of doctrine, of far too little import, to trouble the minds of men of enlarged views and philosophic principles. How differently did the holy army of martyrs think and act, during the Marian persecutions in our own country; they cheerfully went to the stake, rather than give place even for a moment, to errors which they knew had been the ruin of many an immortal soul.

But we must pass on to the sentence of this spiritual Jezebel, which is as clearly announced in the epistle before us, as her sins.

“I gave her space,” continues our Lord,—perhaps to intimate the lapse of centuries during which Popery was

spreading over the whole face of Christendom,—“I gave her space, to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold,”—to call our attention strongly to the singular nature of her punishment,—“Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds; and I will kill her children with death; and all the Churches shall know, that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts.”

In other words, I will not cut off Papal Rome, as I cut off Pagan Rome, in a moment, by the breath of my mouth; I will not, as it were, despatch her at a blow, but I will cast her into a bed of languishing and sickness, that all the Protestant Churches may behold the day of her visitation: that as they have seen her year after year aggrandising herself with the wealth of nations, and setting her foot upon the necks of kings, and ruling the destinies of the

world, so now shall they behold her, year after year, losing all her ill-gotten possessions, driven out of country after country, waxing weaker and weaker, her flesh and her strength failing her, until, like one who falls beneath the inroads of decline, she shall gradually waste even unto death, flattering herself to the very last that it is no mortal malady, and holding forth in her expiring struggles, a frightful example of the recklessness of those who desert the living God.

Is it possible to imagine a more accurate description of the fate which, from the days of the blessed Reformation, when the mortal sickness of Popery first began, even to the present hour, has attended and is attending, Papal Rome, than is here conveyed by our Lord in a single phrase, "I will cast her into a bed" of sickness, and as it shall assuredly be, in His good time, a bed of death? Is there one among us,

who knows any thing of the history of the Church, or of the world, during the last three centuries, who cannot pronounce upon its truth? The name of Pope, at the mere mention of which, in days gone by, the sceptered monarch grew pale upon his throne, has now become almost an empty title; while the weight of the triple crown has become but as dust upon the balance in the scale of European policy. And although we fear that we ourselves as a people, by forbearing to follow out the principles of the blessed Reformation, and acting far too much in the spirit of worldly concession and sympathy with this great enemy of pure and undefiled religion, have soothed her dying pillow, and endeavoured to traverse the designs of the Almighty, and are at this moment suffering and shall suffer for having thus procrastinated her dying pangs; still the threatening of the Lord standeth sure; and however dark and

desperate be the death-struggles of Popery, never shall she arise from that bed of languishing, restored to her pristine energy and health; but as the clear rays of gospel truth rise higher and higher upon our horizon, she shall sink lower and lower, until she meet the fate, for which the accumulated guilt of centuries of error, and centuries of blood, have fitted her, until she perish from off the earth, and “the carcass of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field.”

In conclusion, we must consider the promise of the Saviour, with which the epistle closes. “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.”*

* Revelation ii. 26, 27.

By the former part of this promise, the power which the true disciples of Christ shall exercise over "the nations," as the followers of the Papacy are here denominated, is probably intended, the spiritual effects of those great truths, which the rod of God's strength, the everlasting gospel, brought to light at the Reformation; and which have in so wonderful a manner, broken in pieces the fetters of superstition, and swept away the refuges of lies from so many countries of the world. The latter portion of the promise, however, from its application to our own business and bosoms, requires perhaps a more minute investigation, "I will give him the morning star."

Had not our Lord made use of the same remarkable expression again, in a more advanced portion of this prophecy, we should have been at a loss in what manner to have interpreted a phrase, which as it stands thus isolated and un-

explained is perfectly unintelligible. By a reference, however, to the 16th verse of the 22d chapter, we find our Lord distinctly declaring, “I am the bright and morning star.”

This then is the gift, even Himself, with which the Saviour presents the overcoming Christian, when he says, “I will give him the morning star,” to enlighten his dreary prospect, to guide his wandering feet, and to cheer his darkened heart.

It is a peculiarity well worthy of observation, that in the “exceeding great and precious promises,”* with which our Lord concludes each of these epistles, the highest reward that He holds out, the richest possession that He ever offers to His overcoming servants, is—the promise of Himself. Thus, as we have already seen, to the conquering Christians of one age, He promised the fruit of the “tree of life,” even Jesus Christ, of which

* 2 Peter i. 4.

“if a man eat, he shall live for ever.” To those of another, He promised “the hidden manna,” even Jesus Christ, the true bread which came down from heaven. To those of a third, He also promises “the morning star,” even Jesus Christ the Sun of Righteousness.

Whence comes it, brethren, that in the unbounded wealth of heaven, there is so little variety; in the unsearchable riches of Christ, so great a paucity of gifts! that Christ and Christ alone should be the highest heritage, and dearest reward, of His overcoming servants? We trust that many among you can, from your own experience, from the feelings of your own hearts, well answer this inquiry; that you are able to reply, What more could even God Himself bestow? Possessing Christ, we know, we feel, we realise the apostle’s declaration,” “All things are ours, and we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”*

* 1 Corinthians iii. 22, 23.

Yes, brethren, we trust that many among you do thus know, and that many more, in God's good time, will thus know, by happy experience, the full meaning of the promise and its fulfilment; that often amidst the trials and disappointments of life, when other friends and other prospects fail you, and other comforters there are none, you will be enabled to say, Christ is mine, and in Him I have Father, Brother, Husband, Friend—"thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." That often, while on the bed of sickness, when all the world must be shut out, when the curtains which are drawn around you, are emblems of the veil that must soon be let fall for ever between you and the inhabitants of earth, you will still be enabled to rejoice in Him, who when once yours, is yours for ever; whose brightness no veil can intercept, if He have once arisen as the morning star within your heart; and

who will there shine forth in all the peace and hope and love which attend Him, and pour into your soul, the beams of His grace, as freely and as fully in the darkest day of sickness and of death, as in the brightest hour of health and prosperity.

We need not then tell the Christian, for he already knows by happy experience, why our Lord, under whatever symbol he expressed it, reserved this blessed promise of Himself, as the richest treasure for his overcoming people! because there is nothing in this world which can bear a moment's competition, with it; because there is no other gift in all the treasury of heaven for which you would exchange it; because it is the only gift, equally dear at all hours, equally invaluable under all dispensations. In the darkest moments of affliction and sorrow, He has been to you "the morning star." In the most trying time of the soul's worst famine,

He is to you "the hidden manna." In the hour of death and in the day of judgment, He will be to you "the tree of life." "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

But there is yet a last use to be made of this transcendant promise, before we leave it. It is to help to impress upon those among you, to whom all that we have just said, sounds like the fancies of the enthusiast, rather than the sober conviction of the staid and settled believer, that where this promise is not realised, where Christ is not sought as the first, great object of your love, and your obedience, and your anticipations, there all duties, all ordinances of religion, are dead and unprofitable. It was beautifully said by one of old, in reference to this very feeling, which I am now endeavouring to inculcate, "Use thy duties, as Noah's dove did her wings, to carry thee to the ark of the Lord Jesus Christ, where only there is rest: if she had

never used her wings, she had fallen into the water, and if she had not returned to the Ark, she had found no rest: so if thou shalt use no duties, but cast them off, thou art sure to perish, but if they convey thee not to Christ, thou wilt still lie down in sorrow." Would that it might please God to convey this truth to every heart now present. Be assured that our Lord would never have made HIMSELF the great object of all His promises, if His people could exist without Him. No, every era of Christianity has left one, and but one record; viz. that Christ and Christ alone is the satisfying portion of His people. Listen to the Church in one age exclaiming, "My beloved is mine and I am His."* In another, and the voice issued from a throne, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire, in comparison of Thee."* In a third, and the cry came even from

* Solomon's Song ii. 16.

† Psalm lxxiii. 25.

the fires of martyrdom, "None but Christ, none but Christ." Brethren, the language of the Church in all ages, must be the language of our hearts, if we desire to be with Christ where He is, and to behold His glory; our constant prayer must be, that Christ, "the power of God and the wisdom of God," may be our own; that He may be made unto us, individually, "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."*

* Corinthians i. 30.

EPISTLE TO SARDIS.

LECTURE VI.

REVELATION iii. 3.

Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard;
and hold fast, and repent.

IN the last church-state, of which we considered the Church in Thyatira to be the type, we beheld the Christian Church suffering deeply and grievously from the errors and the oppression of Popery. We traced it during the time when that unscriptural system was predominant, and we concluded at the period of the ever-blessed Reformation, when the infliction of the threatened punishment had commenced, when the Church of Rome

had been cast upon her bed of languishing, from which she never since has arisen, and from which she never shall arise, in her pristine energy and health, but shall continue wasting gradually, yet surely, until she go hence and be no more seen.

The Church of Sardis, then, of which we are to speak this day, we believe to be the type of the Christian Church after the Reformation, including the present period within its limits and stretching on even to that blessed and happy time, foretold by the prophet, when "knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea."*

We commence by again calling your attention to the appropriate nature of the preface to the epistle before us. "These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." The seven stars are, as we are told in the 20th verse of the 1st

* Isaiah xi. 9.

chapter, the symbols of the angels, or bishops, of the seven Churches; while the phrase, "the seven Spirits of God," is the language which the evangelist adopts in the 4th verse of the same chapter to express God the Holy Ghost, in this remarkable benediction, "Grace be unto you and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ;" clearly showing that the seven Spirits before the throne can intend only "God the Holy Ghost," since no created beings could ever have been united by the apostle, with God the Father and God the Son, as the eternal source of grace and peace. Our Lord, therefore, in the passage before us, by describing Himself as one who hath "the seven Spirits of God," intends to remind His Church, that He has, as the prophet Malachi expresses it, "the residue of the Spirit;" that Christ and

His Spirit are never separated ; that if we “have not the Spirit of Christ we are none of His ;” and that if we desire a real revival of religion in the Church at large, such as marked the era of the Reformation, or a distinct and influential increase of spiritual feeling in our own hearts, they are to be obtained entirely by the outpouring of God the Holy Ghost, and this can only be expected by earnest, faithful, persevering application to Him, who hath “the residue of the Spirit.” A truth how well remembered during the first days of the Reformation, let the prayers and the practices of the whole body of Protestant confessors and Protestant martyrs most loudly tell ; but alas ! ought we not to add, also, a truth how lamentably forgotten, how seldom acknowledged, how little acted upon, in the Protestant Church, after the first ardour of the Reformation cooled, let almost a century of deadness and formality in the reformed

Churches, both on the continent and at home, as plainly declare. Thanks be to God, however, this truth is once again reviving, and men will now hear of spiritual influences, without ridicule ; and of the operations of the Holy Ghost, without prejudice ; and of the necessity of being born again of the Spirit, and renewed by the Spirit, and directed daily and hourly by the good Spirit of our God, without doubting, with Festus of old, the sanity of the speaker, or believing that such vital and blessed truths have their origin in the heated brain of the enthusiast. For this, we desire continually to thank God ; for we believe that never is there in any age, a real increase of true religion, and practical holiness, without its having been preceded and accompanied by a wide extension of this great truth, and a large outpouring of the spirit of prayer, for these divine and essential spiritual influences.

We proceed to the consideration of

the epistle itself,—“ I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent.”

The propriety of this language even to the reformed Church of the Redeemer, will be applicable, if we call to mind how very speedily after the day-star of the Reformation arose, its light was dimmed, and its face was clouded. Even the Reformers themselves confessed that the Reformation never was finished: our own Church declares as much in her service for Ash-Wednesday; while those who are best read in the writings of the ages which have succeeded that glorious era, when the Church emerged from the darkness of Popery, will mournfully agree that our Lord spake the language of truth when

He asserted, "I have not found thy works perfect," i. e. complete, filled up, "before God." "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard." Recollect how plainly the great truths of the gospel were promulged by Luther and Melancthon, by Cranmer and Latimer and Ridley, and the holy army of martyrs, and "hold fast, and repent."

But we must not, by speaking thus generally of these charges of our Lord, neglect the individual application of them. What is true of the particular church-state of which we speak, and in which our lot has been cast, must be true of many individuals in it, may be true of ourselves.

Let us, then, employ a few moments in the examination of them. First, our Lord declares, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

He speaks, then, in these words, evidently of those who make some profession

of religion. The outward, gross, and avowed sinner, who despises even the form of godliness, has not a name that lives; here is, therefore, no reference to him. But to you, who by your attendance upon the ministry of the gospel, and the ordinances and sacraments of Christ, declare yourselves to be his followers, and therefore possess a name, we are fully justified in offering the charge before you, as a matter for personal self-examination. Are you, then, so deeply engaged in the pleasures and the vanities of the world, that they engross your time, and your thoughts, and your affections; the day passing over you in idleness which leaves no profitable trace upon your memory or your heart; the night devoted to society; and the great work of the soul all crowded into these few Sabbath hours? Or, is the same effect produced, though by a widely different cause? does the necessary business of life thus enslave and alienate

you, and do you think that the duty of providing for your family is quite sufficient excuse in your case, for making so slender a provision for your soul? It matters little what is the cause, when this is the effect; you have, indeed, most fearful reason to apprehend that you can make no satisfactory answer to the charge before you, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." For that spiritual life which is not fed by daily prayer, which is not influencing the whole week, which is not supplying motives, and desires, and rules of action, throughout the daily intercourse of life, and making the kingdom of God and your preparation for it the first feeling of your heart, is but a name; and at the last great day will be found to have been but as "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

Again, you who have made some progress in religion, and yet whose Christian profession produces such few

and meagre fruits. In your business, it does not prevent you from taking any undue advantage of those who are less wary, or less prudent, than yourselves; there is as much covetousness, as eager a desire to accumulate, and as little hesitation about the manner and the method of it, as in those who have no religious feelings at all. In your families, there is as much inconsistency, and extravagance, and display, as in the most worldly. In secret, there is, whenever the opportunity offers, indulgence in sinful practises which your heart condemns. In your domestic intercourse, there are as many outbreakings of unkind and evil tempers, of sullenness, of irritability, of harsh and angry speeches to those who are with you, of uncharitable reflections upon those around you, as in houses where the word of God is not respected, and family prayer is a thing unknown. What is religion but a name, when these things go on from

day to day, and from year to year, unchecked?

Great need, then, have we all of these warnings of our Redeemer, for to whom may we not with propriety address his own exhortation, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God." He who looks into the heart, sees no work perfect there; every thing unfinished, incomplete, marred at its very best, by some mingling of earthly motives, some unworthy intention, from which the action flows, or some unholy frame by which it is succeeded. Man beholds, for instance, an act of splendid charity; but Christ looks into the core of that fair fruit, and there He sees the worm of selfishness or vanity. Man beholds the tear of penitence, and hears the strongest declaration of self-abhorrence and humility; but Christ again looks into the heart, and there in some dark

corner sits spiritual pride, feasting herself upon the praises which men are heaping on this mock humility. Men hear us speak of love to God, as if we burned with the zeal of an archangel, but Christ follows us into our chambers, and there finds our prayers so cold, our meditations so heartless, that Satan himself might boast of love to God with almost as much propriety as we. To that Saviour who sees the heart, nothing appears filled up, nothing carried out to that extent, to which by the grace of God, even such poor, erring and imperfect beings as ourselves, might carry them. Well, then, does he add, "Remember how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent." It is this holding fast which is the first step towards filling up; and doubtless one great reason why so many never attempt to strive for the higher advances in the Christian life, that spiritual progress of which the last epistle

spoke, is because they hold so loosely what they have already heard so inattentively, and received so carelessly. Upon this point, we would especially desire to warn and caution you, because we believe it to be one on which so very many greatly need our warning.

There have been times when you have left the sanctuary of God, with deep and solemn impressions of the sacred truths which you have "received and heard;" and as you have been returning to your homes, you have resolved that nothing should induce you to yield to temptations into which you have before repeatedly fallen; you have even declared to yourself that certain associates should be given up; certain people, or places, or practices, avoided, because you feel that they have led you into sin, and you cannot bear the thought of the fearful reckoning, by which that sin must be inevitably followed. Or, better still, because you

see such a charm in a truly religious life, and such a blessedness for those who seek God, and such loveliness in God Himself as revealed to you in Christ Jesus, that you find you cannot justify yourself, even to your own heart, in the course you are now pursuing. These are your better moments ; these are the times when the Spirit of God is striving with you, and proving to your soul, that there really is something in religion, something in a life of holy communion with God, and obedience to him, which as certainly surpasses the poor perishing pleasures of the world, as it will assuredly outlive them. And why have not these feelings lasted? or why produced no fruit? And why, in so short a time, have Satan and the world, and your corrupt heart, again asserted their supremacy, and again obtained a triumph? were these great realities less true, when you were neglecting them, than

when you first received them? No! This was not the reason that their influence was so feeble, their reign so short. It was because you neglected to "hold fast what you had received and heard." There was no earnest, faithful, persevering prayer to God, which, "like a nail in a sure place,"* would have transfixed the feeling, and have kept it there. There was no strong and settled grasp by which the hand of a true faith clings to each doctrine, precept, promise, as it is held out to it; but there was a trifling, a mere playing with the solemn realities of the scripture, and of God, permitting them to flit around your fancy, but never actually closing with them, embracing them, and thus making them your own, to live and die upon them. Who can be surprised at the result; they have left no durable impression upon your soul; you are not in any, the slightest

* Isaiah xxii. 23.

degree, the better for having once heard, and for the passing hour approved and appreciated them. We urge you, then, now to listen to the Saviour's exhortation, "hold fast the things that remain," the little abiding sense of these great truths which yet survives, weak and feeble though it be, and ready to perish. Cling to them with that energy with which if a man were forced off the brink of a precipice he would cling to the roots of some projecting tree, as the last hope between him and eternity. So cling to the hope set before you in Christ Jesus our Lord; though your hold be now fainter and weaker than it once was, though your hands be weary, slacken not your grasp; remember, if this fail you, all will fail you; there is no other hope; there is not another projecting fibre between you and the hell beneath. "Be watchful, strengthen the things that remain;" prayer will strengthen them, holy obe-

dience will strengthen them, a renewed application to the blood of Christ will strengthen them, and will enable you to regain your footing upon the rock from whence you are fallen, and once more to stand firmly, and to be at peace.

But we must speak briefly of the threatening in this epistle before we pass on to its concluding promise.

There is a peculiarity in this threatening differing fearfully from all that precede it, viz. that it is a type of those judgments which are at the present moment unfulfilled! When we read in the first epistle that unless the Church in the apostle's age repented, its candlestick should be removed; we remarked at the same time its fulfilment. She did not repent, her candlestick was removed, the open ministration of the Spirit ceased, and she became the early prey of heretics and schismatics. Again, when we marked in the days of the Church's opulence

and power, the threatening that unless she repented, the Lord would come quickly, and fight against her with the sword of his mouth; we traced her increasing impenitence and worldliness, until by the irruption of the Arian nations, and other scourges of the Almighty, this threatening also was fulfilled. In the last epistle, when we brought before you the predicted punishment of Popery, the bed of languishing into which she should be cast, we bore witness to the truth of God's word by reminding you how evidently this prediction also was even now receiving its completion.

But, brethren, here our notices of accomplished prophecy must cease. We now enter upon untrodden ground. We have now arrived at that point when prophecy is, if we may so say, in its transition state, and when we ourselves are forming the important link between predictions fulfilled, and predictions re-

maining to be accomplished ; in fact, the step between prophecy and history. We may be, as a nation, now standing in that gap, where during our backward view, we have beheld generation after generation remaining for a moment exposed to the wrath of God, and then falling prostrate before His avenging arm.

“If, therefore, thou shalt not watch,” says our Lord to this church-state in which our lot is cast, “I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” Unless as a nation we repent, unless we retrace our steps, unless we acknowledge God more readily and more devoutly in the great council of the realm, and are willing by our public acts, to make some sacrifices for His sake and for His glory, maintaining His Church, honouring His ever-blessed Son, hallowing His Sabbaths, this threatening also will be fulfilled, and England, who has sat as a queen among the nations, will see, as

the due reward of her ingratitude, these predicted judgments come upon her as a thief, and her religious privileges, her highest glories, trampled in the dust.

Lastly, the promises with which this epistle closes. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

In the darkest days of Protestantism there have ever been, and there shall always be, some who have not "defiled their garments" with the sins and the pollutions of the age in which they live, and like the seven thousand in Israel, have never bowed the knee to Baal. These are beautifully described in the words before us as walking with the Lord, "in white," to mark the degree of moral purity, of cleanness of heart and thought and motive and desire which the Lord Jesus Christ expects, and of that sanctification which He works in all His redeemed people. If then,

brethren, you are hoping to enjoy the promises attached to this church-state, the question you must ask yourselves is **Have I** been enabled, clothed in the righteousness of my Redeemer, to walk in the white robes of grace and purity and holiness and religious consistency, during the engagements and duties of every day, and is the Lord Jesus Christ able to say of me, "They walk with me in white, and are worthy?" The whitest robes in which you could be clad even by grace itself would profit you nothing, unless you were thus walking with Christ, so entirely united to Him by true and living faith that He is one with you and you with Him; so near to Him, that the folds of His garment of unspotted whiteness are extended over you, covering your deformities, your infirmities, and your sin; holding daily communion with Him, and cultivating that spiritual resemblance to Him, that similarity of mind and spirit and temper,

which will itself constitute the perfection of heaven ; for “ WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM,” says St. John, “when we shall see Him as He is.”

“To him that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels.”

How beautifully does this promise, which shall be fulfilled in heaven, harmonise with the promise which we have just described as even now fulfilling upon earth. You shall never put off the white robe of holiness and purity, with which your Lord and Saviour has arrayed you here, until you are called to put on the still brighter robe of immortality and glory prepared for you hereafter.

How blessed will be the exchange ! You who best know, by painful experience, the practical difficulties of the Christian life, will best estimate the value of the promise ; that you shall

put off those robes which, after all your efforts and all your prayers, never remain unsullied for a single day on earth, and untorn by the briars of the world through which you are walking, some hasty word, some unholy temper, some sinful imagination, spotting and defiling them, some harassing event, or some unworthy action tearing and disfiguring them; and that you shall put on those robes of immortality and glory which throughout the ages of eternity shall never be discoloured by a single stain, or injured by a single rent. That, instead of confessing Christ before men, always a difficult and painful duty, the Lord Jesus Christ has declared, "I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels." Instead of the imperfect services of these earthly temples where every prayer and every praise carries up with it to the throne of grace its sad accompaniment of carelessness, and weariness, and worldliness,

and sin, you shall for ever unite your voice “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven who laud and magnify God’s glorious name, evermore praising Him and saying, **Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory, glory be to Thee, O Lord Most High.**”

EPISTLE TO PHILADELPHIA.

LECTURE VII.

REVELATION iii. 12.

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of
my God, and he shall go no more out.

IN our comments upon the last epistle, we brought before you those evidences, which we deemed sufficient to demonstrate that it was typical, and probably prophetical, of the state of the Christian Church at the present day. We also added, that we had reason to believe that the period in which our lot is cast, is the last church-state previous to the great spiritual change, of which the prophets have so frequently spoken :

that glorious period, when the true Church of Christ shall have so lengthened her cords and strengthened her stakes, that she shall extend the shadow of her tabernacle throughout the inhabited portions of the globe on which we live. These prophecies are by many so little thought of, and so little known, that, confining ourselves to the language of Scripture, we shall, before commencing the epistle upon which we are to comment this morning, consider a few of these remarkable declarations of Jehovah upon the still future, but certain, prospects of the Church.

“It shall come to pass in the last days,” says the prophet Isaiah, “that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.”* “He shall have dominion from sea to sea,” says David, speaking of our Lord

* Isaiah ii. 2.

and Saviour Jesus Christ, “and from the river to the ends of the earth All kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him All nations shall call Him blessed The whole earth shall be filled with his glory.”* “From the rising of the sun,” says the prophet Malachi, “unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.”† “The kingdom and dominion,” says Daniel, “and the greatness of the kingdom, under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominion shall serve Him.”‡ “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into

* Psalm lxxii. 8, &c.

† Malachi i. 11.

‡ Daniel vii. 27.

pruning-hooks ; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”* “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them : and the cow and the bear shall feed ; their young ones shall lie down together : and the lion shall eat straw like the ox ; and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den ; they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God’s holy mountain.”† While there is yet another remarkable feature of this blessed and glorious period, of which the prophets tell, when the Almighty, remembering His covenant which He hath made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, shall fulfil His many times repeated promise that “all Israel shall be saved,” that His ancient people,

* Isaiah ii. 4.

† Ibid. xi. 6—9.

the Jews, shall be gathered together, one fold under one Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

These passages of Scripture, then, although no doubt highly allegorical in some portions, and probably hyperbolical in all, have fully warranted the Church of Christ in all ages to look forward with anxiety, and prayerfulness, and joy, to a season such as earth has never witnessed; when, although sin will not be utterly extirpated, nor the seed of evil-doers entirely driven from the face of the earth, there will be such an extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, outwardly over the surface of the globe, and such a deepening and strengthening of the principles of His blessed religion inwardly in the hearts, and souls, and affections of all who call themselves by His name, that it will strictly deserve the name of a world "wherein dwelleth righteousness:" a world in which the three great idols which are now receiving

the adoration of the mass of mankind, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,”* “the trinity of the Gentiles,” shall be cast down from their pedestals, and “the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”† Then shall true and vital godliness, and the principles of pure and undefiled religion, take the lead, in the hearts of individuals, in the conduct of families, in the schemes and plans of politicians, in all the acts and regulations of governments, in short, in the constitution not of a single country, but of the whole world.

We might naturally expect, that in an epistle addressed to the Church at such a period, although to us dark and ambiguous, as the language of unfulfilled prophecy must ever be, there should still exist a very marked and decided difference, between it and every other. In the epistle before us, we are justified in saying that this distinction will be

* 1 John ii. 16.

† Isaiah ii. 11.

found. Throughout the whole of its instructive verses, there is not a syllable of reprehension, not a single call to repentance, not a word of threatening or reproach, no predictions of suffering; nothing but promises of honour and guidance, and security and happiness, temporal, spiritual, and eternal.

When our Lord was about to speak of a church-state differing so widely from all that had gone before, and therefore its probability no doubt liable to be called in question, by many who should read the words of this prophecy, it was essential to impress those to whom the epistle was sent, with the recollection of the unquestionable veracity of Him who spake. Observe, then, as in the former cases, here also the great and striking propriety of the preface; "To the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write, these things saith He that is holy, He that is true."* Our

* Revelation iii. 7.

Lord here describes himself as possessing two of the great attributes of the eternal Godhead, perfect holiness and perfect truth; that therefore not one jot or one tittle of His word should pass away, until all were fulfilled. Again, He is about to speak, in the words of this epistle, of that most remarkable of all the promises of God, viz. the recall and the conversion of His ancient people the Jews. Of what portion, then, of His prerogative as Mediator could our Lord more properly remind His people than of that to which He refers, when He thus continues, "He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth."

This remarkable expression, "the key of David," occurs only in one other place in the scriptures of God, and that is in the 22d chapter of the prophet Isaiah; the manner in which it is made use of there, will tend very materially

to explain the cause and intention of its adoption in the passage we are considering. The Almighty is declaring that he will bestow upon Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, the government of Jerusalem, and He says, "He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah, and the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open and none shall shut, and he shall shut and none shall open." There is so remarkable a similarity between the two passages, that it is quite impossible to suppose for a moment that it could be accidental. Commentators conclude, therefore, that our Lord intended to convey the same impression by this description of Himself in the epistle before us, as is conveyed by the declaration in the prophecy of Isaiah, viz: that the person spoken of should be "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah;" while, by possessing "the key of David,"

he should have access to the locked-up hearts of that stubborn people, (over whom David once was ruler,) which he should be able to open, though men cannot, and which he should so open that none should thereafter ever close them. Surely it is impossible to imagine any portion of the mediatorial character of our Lord more appropriate for the consideration of the Church at this period, or more encouraging to His ancient people, the Jews, than the peculiar power and kindness of the Saviour towards the house of Israel, of which they are thus strikingly reminded.

We proceed to the contents of the epistle itself.

“I know thy works,” says our Lord; for this is the manner in which, without a single exception, all the seven epistles commence. “Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” Beautiful allusion to that great outpouring of the Spirit, to which we

have referred, when the knowledge of God, and the love of Christ, and the extension of His blessed kingdom, and the wide and deep diffusion of Christian principles, shall reign throughout the world.

How did the Christians in the apostolical age long and pray for blessings such as these! Even then the door had been unlocked, and partially set open, and some few straggling companies, from "every nation under heaven," as the apostle declares, were admitted through it. From that age, even until the present, we may say with truth and gratitude, that the door, which the Spirit of God then opened, has stood immovably ajar. All the opposing pressure of infidelity, and worldliness, and opposition to divine truth, has for eighteen centuries been unable, by its utmost efforts, to shut that door; but then, alas! all the prayers, and all the labours, and all the tears and cries, of God's

redeemed people, have availed but little, nay, almost nothing, in forcing it still further open. True it is, and blessed be God for his mercy, that the work of salvation has been continually carrying on. Souls are brought to Christ, but alas! slowly and singly, one of a city, two of a family, at long and distant intervals; and many are the labours and prayers and exhortations, and many the failures and disappointments and sorrows, of the ministers and the people of God, in adding but one sheep to the fold of the Redeemer. How delightful to look forward to a second rising of the Sun of Righteousness, like some traveller on his midnight journey, to the first opening of the coming dawn. How cheering to the heart of the Christian, now while sitting watchfully and prayerfully beside that partly opened door, so jealously defended from within, so unceasingly pressed upon from without, and to anticipate the hour, when the Lord Jesus

Christ, He who “shutteth and no man openeth, and openeth and no man shutteth,” shall with His own hand fling wide that portal, and even Satan himself, for a time subdued and fettered, shall be unable to obstruct the entrance of the thousands and tens of thousands who shall rush forward for admittance into the heavenly temple. Then shall be fulfilled the glowing language of the prophet, “The earth shall be made to bring forth in one day. A nation shall be born, at once.”* “They gather themselves together, they come to thee.”† “They shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.”‡ “Thy gates shall be open continually, they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought.”§ While so thickly shall the heirs of salvation

* Isaiah lxvi. 8.

† Ibid. xlix. 18.

‡ Ibid. lx. 7.

§ Ibid lx. 11.

press into the kingdom of Christ, so anxiously shall they hasten to this open door, that the prophet Isaiah is represented as asking in astonishment at their numbers without number, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"*

How impossible is it for the Christian, who really loves his Lord, and who feels compassion for the souls of his fellow-sinners, to think of such a blessed, such a heart-encouraging prospect, without experiencing within him a well-spring of joy, which nothing earthly can impart. Surely even the angels themselves, if they rejoice over the one sinner that repenteth, must day by day, amidst the brightest harmonies of their golden harps, while looking forward to this glorious consummation, be for ever reiterating the inquiry, in one continual chorus, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, how long, O Lord, how long?"†

* Isaiah lx. 8.

† Rev. vi. 10.

We are not surprised that the Lord Jesus Christ himself, to whom the spiritual strength of the holiest man, yea of all the holiest men who have ever lived, can be but as the child's feebleness in the apprehension of a giant, could acknowledge of so glorious a church-state as this, "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."*

To the true Christian this is perhaps the most blessed portion of the prophecy. It is much to hear that "none shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain." It is much to be told that the name of God shall be known, and loved, and rejoiced in, "from sea to sea, and from shore to shore;" but it is infinitely more to know that all shall keep His word, and that none shall deny His name. We are aware, that the careless, the disobedient, the inconsistent, the nominal Christian, cannot be expected

* Revelation iii.8.

to enter into feelings such as these ; but if there be any among us who experience with deep regret the remains of an old and corrupted nature, the body of sin and death still hanging about them, impeding their every holy effort, clogging with imperfection and with sin their purest thoughts, their most ardent endeavours, their most faithful prayers, they will fully appreciate the unspeakable blessings of a state in which these enemies shall no longer assail the followers of God, or if assailing, shall assuredly be overcome. If earth can ever resemble heaven, it will be then, when by the universal prevalence of Christian principles, Christ shall take unto Him His great power and reign ; and when to do His will, to confess His name, to rejoice in His salvation, shall supersede all the pleasures of sense all the day dreams of ambition, all the fading glories of the world.

But there is yet another important portion of the prophecy to be considered,

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.” In these words we have a distinct reference to the state of the children of Israel at the commencement of this period of the spiritual reign of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He says, they are “of the synagogue of Satan,” “calling themselves Jews, and yet are not.” It would probably be difficult to find any description of this degraded and outcast people, as they exist at present, more perfectly in agreement with the strictest truth than these words. Painful as it is to confess it, we have the testimony of all travellers who have inquired into the state of the Jews in the different countries of the world, over which they have now been for so many centuries scattered, yet with which never intermingled, that they are Israelites only

by extraction and by name, without a temple, without sacrifices, without therefore a shadow of acceptable worship; for their own law has declared, that “without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin;”* and they, while persevering in denying the efficacy of the blood of the Lamb of God, bring no blood of sprinkling as their law commands, to purify their defilements, and are therefore living in the open, constant neglect of all that, according even to their own views, is necessary for their own acceptance before God. While the majority of them, we fear, have as little respect for Moses as for Christ, and live as completely in defiance of the law, as they do in disbelief of the gospel. How could they have been more accurately described by the language of prophecy, than they are in the passage before us, as those “who say they are Jews, and are not?”

* Hebrews ix. 22.

. Of these, then, viz. of all the children of Israel, however blind and ignorant, the time shall come when the word of God, and the power of God, shall reach their hard and stubborn hearts, and the whole tenor of God's word upon this interesting subject shall be fully borne out, by their conversion as a people to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and their admittance to the worship of the true Church of the Redeemer, when the "fulness of the Gentiles" being come in, as in that church-state of which we are speaking, the Jewish Church shall learn the gospel at the feet of the Christian Church, as St. Paul of old, at the feet of Gamaliel, and worship with her, and know what eighteen centuries have not yet taught them, the love of God in Christ Jesus for all the families of the earth; and that great New Testament truth, that "there is" now "neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor

female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus ; and if ye be Christ's, then ye are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

The epistle then continues, " Because thou hast kept the word of my patience," i. e. the gospel of Christ, " I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation," or trial, " which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly ; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

The hour of trial, from which the Lord here promises that He will keep His people, is that season which shall succeed the period of which we have now been speaking, and upon which, as a more especial reference will be made to it in the next discourse, it will be unnecessary now to dwell.

The only sentence of advice to be found throughout this whole epistle, is

* Galatians iii. 28.

conveyed in the single recommendation, "Hold that fast which thou hast."* They were not counselled to obtain more, they were not directed, as we are, to be seeking, as a church, for larger supplies of knowledge, and grace, and love. In that blessed state, it will be enough to hold fast what they have, so universally will holy principles, and spiritual knowledge, and ardent zeal, and devotedness of life and heart, be diffused throughout the whole body of the Christian Church. Surely to those who are privileged to see that day, there will be nothing even in heaven itself, except the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, which can make it preferable to that earth in which

"His name shall sound from shore to shore,
Till suns shall rise and set no more."

We conclude with the promise with which the epistle finishes, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the

* Revelation iii. 11.

temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name.”

We are told that it was not uncommon among the heathen nations of antiquity to erect monumental pillars within the temples of their gods, and to inscribe on these columns the most important circumstances in the life of the deceased;—for instance, the name of the particular deity under whose auspices he had placed himself, the name of the city of which he was enrolled a citizen, and the name of the general under whose command he had fought, and bled, and conquered. There is then, probably, an allusion to this striking custom, in the gracious promise of our Lord to the Christian conqueror. On the day when his earthly warfare shall

have finished, he shall be removed into the heavenly temple, even into the heaven of heavens itself, and shall become a perpetual trophy, a glorious monument of the victory of his redeeming Leader. He shall bear the name of his God, under whose auspices he has contended, even the Lord Jehovah; the name of the city, among whose holy and happy inmates he shall be for ever enrolled, even that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* Above all, shall be written upon him the name, "the new name," of Him under whom he has fought the good fight, and kept the faith, and received the crown, "even my new name," says the Lord Jesus Christ, Redeemer, Saviour, Mediator, Intercessor, for these were all new names, obtained on Calvary by Him who had been from all eternity "King of kings, and Lord of lords." My brethren, when heaven and earth

* Hebrews xi. 10.

shall pass away, when all that hath been is no more, these living pillars in the temple of their God shall stand unchanged and unchangeable, everlasting monuments of the love of the Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, and of the happiness of His redeemed people, "for they shall go no more out for ever."

This is the peculiarity which renders the promise before us so unspeakably valuable, the perpetuity of the blessings which it contains. If it declared to you that you should be admitted to the joys of the heavenly temple for any limited period, however long, there could be no perfect happiness: the thought that every day brought you nearer to the close; the conviction that, however distant, that closing hour must come; the tremendous reflection of what should be, if we may say so, beyond the end, would mar even the happiness of the heavenly temple, and make you wretched there. How blessed, then, is the assu-

rance, that when once removed into that blissful abode, you shall go no more out.

There are many among you, and we thank God that we may believe an increasing number, who know something of the privileges of the Christian's life on earth, something of communion with God, and of the joys of spiritual fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ. But how miserably defective are those joys, and how imperfect that communion, none but yourselves can tell. The more high and holy your duties, the more speedily do they weary you, and convince you day by day, that yours is, indeed, a fallen, corrupted nature, and that there is a great gulf fixed between the holiest worshipper upon earth, and the lowest door-keeper in the house of our God in heaven. It is, then, a delightful and most profitable anticipation to look forward to the full and complete accomplishment of the promise before us, when "time shall be no longer," when, his great

work finished, his long and weary flight concluded, he shall fold up his wings for ever, and drop into the ocean of eternity.

Think, then, we beseech you, what and where shall you then be? In a state unalterably fixed, once and for ever. This is certain; would to God it were equally certain, that we might answer for each and for all of us, inheriting the promise of the text, "Pillars in the temple of our God, who shall go no more out." How overwhelming, yet how blissful is the thought; the unclouded presence of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, whose "name is love," shining upon us throughout the unnumbered ages of eternity: a worship which shall never weary, a service which shall never fatigue, pleasures that cannot fade, all infinite in extent, eternal in duration, knowing no change, suffering no diminution, having no end.

May this solemn reflection, and the anticipation of such a state, so un-

utterably happy, rest upon our souls, and shed a hallowing influence upon us, winning us if it may be, even for a Sabbath hour, from earth, and drawing us nearer heaven. Well calculated is it to produce this effect, well calculated to induce us devoutly to attend to those peculiarly solemn and soul-affecting services of the week upon which we have this day entered,* which have been so wisely appointed by our apostolical Church to prepare the minds of her people for the most awful anniversaries of the Christian year,—the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us not, by our neglect of these daily services, demonstrate that our religious feelings are experienced only on the Sunday, but let us prove, by our regular and serious attendance at these truly impressive and profitable preparations, that we are anxious, by the aid of God's good Spirit, to bring

* Passion Week.

our hearts and affections, our thoughts and feelings, into some little unison with those high themes which will engage us on the days to which we have alluded, and which will doubtless be among the mysteries, the developement of which will delight our minds and gladden our hearts, when the period of which we have been speaking shall arrive, and we shall reside for ever in the temple of our God.

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EPISTLE TO LAODICEA.

LECTURE VIII.

REVELATION iii. 20.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

WE have now arrived at the last portion of that connected and interesting series of history and prophecy, through which we have been travelling. We have traced the progress of the Christian Church from the days of her infancy, when her few, but eminently holy and devoted members, were contained within one house of prayer, and covered by a single roof. We have beheld her gradually enlarging her

boundaries, until her temples were seen springing up in all lands, and the voices of prayer and praise were heard throughout the habitations of men. These were the days of her maturity ; while deeply interesting was that picture of her riper years, of holy energy and fervent devotion, with which the last epistle presented us.

Happy should we feel, if the closing scene, which we are now approaching, had been equally brilliant. All revelation, however, tends to prevent any such expectation ; and the epistle before us, addressed as it obviously is, to a decaying church, is in full accordance with every other portion of the word of God. It is indeed descriptive of the feeble and futile efforts of a decrepid old age ; of that church-state to which our Lord particularly alludes, when he says, "The love of many shall wax cold ;" of that period, to which he so expressly refers, when

he predicts, "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man;"* "likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;" "even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."† Evidently marking a time, particularly characterised by an entire engrossment by the things of the world, a total forgetfulness of God. While, with reference again to this same church-state, our Lord emphatically inquires, "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"‡ the very inquiry itself containing by implication, the strongest negative reply.

That you may, however, still more distinctly perceive from the unerring word of God, that such a state of things is to be expected even after that glorious period to which the last

* Luke xvii. 26.

† Luke xvii. 30.

‡ Luke xviii. 8.

discourse particularly referred, we shall read a portion of the 20th chapter of Revelation, where both these ages of the church are plainly alluded to. "I saw an angel," says the evangelist, "come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that, he must be loosed a little season."* According to the highly figurative language of this remarkable passage of Holy Writ, we apprehend, that by this chaining of Satan, is simply meant the wonderful abridgment of his power and influence which will be felt throughout the whole world, during what may be denominated the Phila-

* Revelation xx. 1—3.

delphian period. When the Spirit of our Lord shall, as we have seen, reign so triumphantly over the largest proportion of the inhabited globe, that the love of God and the desire of pleasing Him, and of obeying His commands, shall take the place of all those selfish and unworthy motives which now, for the most part, regulate mankind. While by the "little season," during which Satan shall again be unloosed, we feel assured, is intended the period marked by the present epistle, as one of gross departure from the laws, and great forgetfulness of the worship of the Lord our God. The same prophecy is repeated in the same chapter, where it is declared that "When the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations, which are in the four quarters of the earth."*

* Revelation xx. 7, 8.

This, then, is the period spoken of in the epistle before us, when Satan with renewed power, and doubtless with animosity and hatred tenfold multiplied by his long enchainment, shall once more be liberated to walk to and fro on the earth, and to “deceive the nations.” And this shall be the conclusion of all things temporal. For the evangelist immediately adds, speaking of the time when this little season of impiety and ungodliness shall be over, “I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”*

The epistle before us commences thus, “And unto the angel of the church

* Revelation xx. 11, 12.

of the Laodiceans, write ; These things, saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God.* “These things, saith the Amen.” He who addressed his church at the very commencement of its existence, has overlooked it with a parent’s eye, during every successive age ; and here, in the winding up of the roll of prophecy, is about to utter His parting benediction. He is now to set His seal to all that has gone before, and by assuming this title, appears to indicate that it is “the last time ;” that “the things concerning it have an end ;” and that He who is foretelling them, is the AMEN, who will be there to witness and to pronounce its doom. Again, in this epistle, our Lord is about to testify of the remarkable deadness and coldness of the period of which he speaks, and well knowing the opposition of the

* Revelation iii. 13, 14.

human heart to every statement which tends to lower its imaginary dignity, to affront its pride, or to convict it of unholiness, and sin, He reminds this church-state, that however painful to its feelings His assertions may prove, He is still a "faithful and true witness," adding nothing, diminishing nothing, but simply stating the fact of its apostacy and lukewarmness, with the unshrinking fidelity of an upright witness, when examined upon oath before a court of human judicature. While in declaring Himself the "beginning," or the originator "of the creation of God," our Lord appears not only to assert His acknowledged right to a co-equality with the Father, and to remind the Church of that declaration of Holy Writ, that "by Him were all things made, and without Him was not any thing made that was made;" but also to throw out, as it appears, a hope to the mem-

bers of the Christian Church, at this period, that if they felt convinced that they were indeed "dead in trespasses and sin," there was One, who as the beginner of all spiritual creation, as well as natural, was ready to hear their prayer, to listen to their cry, to take compassion upon their helplessness, and to originate the seed of divine grace within their hearts.

Having commenced with this preface so descriptive of Himself, our Lord thus opens the epistle. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."*

You have often read of God's threatenings against the open sinner, of His curse which follows the profligate, of His eternal condemnation which awaits the ultimately hardened, impenitent and un-

* Revelation iii. 15, 16.

believing, but, if you review them all, even the strongest and most appalling, there is not one which conveys such an idea of absolute loathing and disgust, as the sentence here pronounced against the lukewarm and indifferent. It is as if, while God most dearly loved the zealous Christian, and would comparatively bear, for a time at least, with the open sinner, yet, rather than tolerate for a single moment, these wretched men, who cared just enough about religion to adopt it as a name, but never in any one transaction of their lives, to be really impressed by its threatenings, or influenced by its promises, or directed by its requirements, God should cast them forth, with every mark of loathing and disgust at their trifling and lukewarmness in a work at the very thoughts of which the highest archangels stand amazed. So that our Lord does not scruple to say, "I would thou wert cold, or hot;" I would thou wert something decided, even if it were

in opposition and enmity, something less contemptible, than the poor, paltry, lukewarm, half-hearted followers which I have found you.

How different is the judgment of God from the judgment of the world. With regard to religion the world has but one fear respecting those it loves, and that is, lest they become too zealous, too much in earnest, too devoted, to the care of their souls, and the service of their God. While God also has but one fear respecting those whom He honours with His love, but that is precisely the reverse ; it is lest they remain too cold, too indifferent, too little devoted to the work to which he calls them. Here, then, are at once two grand antagonist principles for ever influencing the hearts of men ; one always holding them back, by the fear of the world's censure, by the dread of its laugh, by the risk of its good opinion ; the other as invariably propelling them forward, by the commands

of God, by the blood of Christ, by the influences of God's good Spirit. Brethren, you who are lukewarm Christians, stand for ever exposed to the attacks of these two opposing principles; to-day you are brought under the power of God's word, you are led for a moment to remember that you have a soul, that there is a coming judgment, that there is an eternity awaiting you, and that accordingly as that soul has been tended upon earth, shall that eternity be passed. Now these are stern realities, you feel them to be so while you hear of them, you cannot put them instantly aside, you cannot reason them away, you cannot laugh them away. You may attempt it, but they defy the sneer and scoffs of man; we do not say, they cannot be ridiculed; but we do say, they cannot be made ridiculous. They are truths, plain, simple, heart-searching truths, you know them to be so, and while you listen to them, you, some at least among you, resolve that

now at last, you will begin in earnest ; that you will really live like one who has to die, that long as you have turned a cold and indifferent ear to these things, you will now give them at least a fair hearing, and if convinced, allow them the prominency they deserve in your actions, your motives, your heart, your life.

But then to-morrow comes, and you mingle with the world again, and you are immersed in its business, or surrounded by its pleasures, and like our first parents, while you look upon the forbidden fruit, you see that it is good for food and pleasant to the eyes, and you cannot long resist it ; old habits, though for a moment checked, are not destroyed, nay not even weakened, they spring up again with redoubled energy from their compression, and before another day has passed, the effects of yesterday are over ; you still think religion a good thing in its place, but then

the place which you assign to it, is widely different from that which God assigns it; you do not indeed desire to be absolutely cold, but you are even more afraid of being hot, you wonder that you ever felt so strongly, or resolved, as you now think, so weakly and absurdly; you attribute it to the excitement of the moment, from which, thank God, you are now delivered; and having thus reasoned away, or trifled away, your new born zeal, you remain the lukewarm Christian still,

Brethren, do you imagine this to be a very rare or remarkable character, one of a thousand? So far from it that we believe it to be the most common, most prevailing characteristic of the days in which we live! we have no doubt that there are hundreds around us, probably some even in this congregation, who exhibit it every week of their lives. Nay, so prevalent is it, and so entirely in accordance with the taste

of the natural heart, that men make a virtue of this very sin of lukewarmness which God condemns, and while they admire zeal in every other calling in human life, the zealous poet, the zealous painter, the zealous politician, the zealous man of business,—when they speak of the zealous Christian, the epithet changes its very meaning, and the phrase becomes a sarcasm and a sneer. While that degree of religion, and that alone, obtains the commendation of the world, which is precisely described by our Lord as “neither hot nor cold,” the object of his strongest loathing and disgust.

This, however, is not the only charge against the Laodicean Church; our Lord continues, “Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.” We mentioned at the commencement of this discourse, that the word of God has revealed, that Satan should be loosed during this period, that he might especially deceive the nations.

How successfully he should succeed in his delusions, the words before us fully testify.

He it is, and he only, who teaches men amidst the wretchedness of their spiritual poverty, and the deadness of their spiritual affections, actually to pride themselves upon those very possessions, and those very qualifications, of which they are utterly destitute: for it is Satan who teaches men, even in the depth of their spiritual poverty, to say, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." I am upright and honourable, amiable and high-minded, and after all, this is the true wealth: what does religion do for others, which a high moral principle has not already done for me? Search all the generations of men, and in every case, except where the Spirit of God has enlightened and transformed the heart, there will you find this self-ignorance and self-deception, and prevailing even in a far lower grade of

the moral standard than I have represented. The worldly man in his worldliness, the thief in his dishonesty, the drunkard in his drunkenness, the unchaste man in his uncleanness, will all return a similar answer. Each is priding himself upon the possession of a single virtue, which he thinks fully compensates for his thousand crimes; each, in the self-sufficiency of his heart, is saying, "I am rich, and have need of nothing." The spiritual blessings of which you so largely talk, I want them not; the blood of Christ to cleanse me from all sin! the Holy Spirit to sanctify me! a God with whom to be reconciled! No, this is enthusiasm, these are all delusions. Thank God, I do my duty in my station; I injure no man; if I am even my own enemy, I am the enemy of no other living creature; I need nothing more than myself, and nothing besides myself, to reconcile me to God. So truly might our Lord address every unconverted man

in the words of the text, "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

This is the Saviour's declaration, the sentence of Him unto whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid: this he says to every individual born into the world, however amiable and benevolent, and upright and excellent. "Wretched and miserable," for you have attempted, like the prodigal, to satisfy an immortal soul with the husks which the swine did eat—"Poor," for you are utterly destitute of the unsearchable riches of Christ—"Blind," for you have no moral perception, no spiritual eye-sight—"Naked," for you have nothing but the tattered garment of your own righteousness in which to stand before God. And in addition to all this, "Thou knowest it not," says our Lord. 'This is the most affecting portion of the charge. It is not merely that you are in this pitiable state of

which we speak, but that you are not aware that you are in it. This is the crowning misery of the unrenewed man. If you knew your state, if you would even believe the honest testimony which the word of God bears to it, all would be well ; not another hour, not another moment would elapse, before you would exclaim, " What shall I do to be saved ?" But it is this ignorance, which we cannot remove, this infatuation over which we have no power, that form the most frightful symptoms of your malady.

Listen, however, to the words of the good Physician, whose hand can heal, where every other hand is powerless.

This, then, is the advice of the Saviour, " I counsel thee to buy of me, gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see."*

* Revelation iii. 18.

“I counsel thee ;” it is the kind and gentle offer of a friend. Christ knows with the certainty of Omniscience, what, perhaps, to the present moment, you have never known, your natural poverty, and nakedness, and blindness ; and He offers, what you perhaps have never sought, and what you certainly can never elsewhere obtain ; gold, and garments, and eye-salve. So wonderfully are the gifts of the Saviour apportioned to your necessities and your wants. The gold which He offers, has, He says, been tried in the fire, and has not been consumed ; no dross, no defilement in that precious ore, to dread the furnace, for that gold is the worthiness of Christ, which has long since borne every test, and which came forth from the furnace even of Calvary itself, pure and undefiled as it entered. The “raiment” which He offers you is “white,” yes, so as no fuller on earth could whiten it, for that raiment is the unspotted righteousness of your Re-

deemer, in which when once you are arrayed, Omniscience itself can discover neither spot nor stain in you. 'The "eye-salve," which He offers you is such, that he declares it will not merely improve your sight, but will actually restore it, that whereas you were blind, now you shall see; for that eye-salve is the illumination of the Spirit of light, by which alone, as all Scripture testifies, the "eyes of our mind being enlightened," we are taught to know what is the hope of His calling, and what the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

If we thus examine each of the remedies here proposed to us, however they may appear to differ, the same remarkable peculiarity, to which we referred in a former discourse, will again be found to attend them all; they are all to be bought of Christ, and they are all comprised in Christ. Establishing most incontrovertibly this great Bible truth, that the want of every destitute

sinner is one and the same, for it is, in fact, the want of a Saviour. If you are poor, Christ is "gold;" if you are blind, Christ's spirit is "eye-salve;" if you are naked, Christ's righteousness is "raiment." He is the depositary of every gift of God, nay more, He is himself "the unspeakable gift" of God; and therefore for all that you can need, and for each that you can need, He sends you to none besides Himself—"I counsel thee, to buy of ME." Ask of HIM in faithful prayer, believing; and every want shall be supplied, and every desire fulfilled.

Our Lord having thus spoken the language of mingled reproof and counsel to this lukewarm, and self-sufficient, and ignorant Church, proceeds to convince them, that desperate as is their case, it is not hopeless, and thus to urge them not to despair, but to repent. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent." Learn from this compassionate language, ad-

dressed to the Church during the very darkest portion of that Church's history, one blessed and comforting truth; God never hates the sinner. "As many as I love, I rebuke." He hates the sin, He would not be God, if He did not; He therefore hates the sin with a holy and perfect hatred, and He rebukes, but He never hates the sinner.

Would that every open sinner now present, might carry away this truth deeply engraven upon his heart. You disobey God, you forget God, you openly affront God, nay we could even prove though you may not allow it, that you hate God, but God never has one feeling of hatred towards you. "God so loved the world,"—and remember, a world lying in sin; full of sinners,—“that He gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* And again, "Herein is love, not

* John iii. 16.

that we loved God,"—therefore the apostle speaks of our unconverted state,—“but that He loved us.”* Yes, brethren, at this moment, that God who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, so loves the most thoughtless, cold, forgetful, lukewarm among you, that He is desirous of your salvation, anxious, above all other things, concerning you, that you should repent of sin, and believe in Christ, and be saved with an everlasting salvation. “Be zealous, therefore;” so God himself requires you, be in earnest. Is the soul worth no anxiety, no fervour, no zeal? Mind not what men say of zeal, and what you yourself have hitherto thought of it, these are God’s own words, “Be zealous, therefore, and repent;” it is a business, in which nothing but zeal, heartfelt, glowing, ardent zeal can be powerful enough to carry you through; and if you resolve

* 1 John iv. 10.

that you will not seek this zeal, that you will not pray for it, that you will continue cold and heartless, as you have ever been, in the great things of eternity, we are bound to tell you, that although God loves you, He will not save you; nay, He cannot save you, for God cannot contradict Himself, and He has thus declared, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." Perish therefore you most unquestionably will in the dark waters, even though in sight of the shore.

But listen yet once again, to the promise which succeeds the precept. "Behold," says the Lord Jesus Christ, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

What remarkable language! what an astonishing picture of the love of Christ to every individual! for this is addressed to every human being who has not yet

opened his heart for the reception of true religion, the admittance of the Saviour. "Behold! I stand at the door and knock!" what condescension! The Lord is now waiting to be gracious! and, brethren, he is not standing there to-day for the first time. No; he has long been standing, long been knocking at the door of your hearts. Do you doubt it? Then consider only for a moment. Have you ever suffered from worldly trials and disappointments? Did you ever lose some well-loved child, some affectionate relative, some dear friend? Were you ever cast upon a bed of sickness? Did you ever feel an unaccountable misgiving at your heart that all was not right within? that if you died you knew not what should happen after death,—a consideration that there was much in your practice, much in your thoughts, much in your life, utterly displeasing to God, and for which a momentary pang

of conscience obtained a hearing? Those were all knockings, loud, distinct, unearthly knockings of the Saviour at your heart, and asking for admittance. And these are not the events of yesterday or to-day alone. No; they have been going on throughout your life. For mark how clearly this is manifested by our Lord's own declaration. Metaphorical, as it no doubt is, can any thing more plainly proclaim the time of day, of which he is speaking, than the meal to which he alludes. He desires to be admitted, that he may sup with you. It is, then, the evening hour of which he speaks. And how has your day been passed? Look back a moment, and observe what God has already done for you. In the morning of your life, when all was fresh around you and within you, before sin had hardened into habit, Christ was there, offering Himself at the door of your heart, as one of the

earliest of its guests; brought there perhaps by a parent's prayers, a mother's fond entreaties. But, even then, "life's journey just began," you refused to let Him in. Once more look back to that season, when, infancy and childhood over, you became a man, and put away childish things. Yes, Christ was there again, in the mid-day of life, knocking, O how loudly, by some warning Providence, some awakening word, some providential recovery from illness, or escape from danger, some spiritual conviction. Again He was refused admittance. And now it is evening with you; you cannot disguise the fact; morning, mid-day, afternoon, all are past, and the lengthened shadows of evening will force themselves upon your observation. Yes, it is evening with you, and to-day He is once more there, beseeching you to admit Him, by all the great and affecting truths which have this week been set before

you,—by His table spread for you, upon which you have so often turned your back,—by His invitations sent to you, which you have so often disregarded,—by His ministers pleading with you, which you have so long neglected,—nay more, by His agony and bloody sweat, by His cross and passion, by His precious death and burial, by His glorious resurrection,—He is this day knocking for admittance, anxious, most anxious, that you should open to Him, that He should come in to you, and sup with you, and you with Him, before the night cometh, and He withdraws Himself for ever, a slighted visiter, a rejected suitor, an insulted guest.

My brethren, is it possible that these offers of a Saviour and of His salvation should be so constant, so pressing, and yet so unattended to? We know that your hearts may be already occupied by the world, by folly, by sin, who have all entered in, and taken possession, and

barred up the door, and kept the Saviour out. But must it ever be so? Will you not—and I plead with you for the sake of your own undying souls—will you not, before all hope is extinguished, before life has fled, will you not once cry to the strong for strength, to unbar this door, and to admit the Saviour, with all His commands, and all his promises, into your soul? Be not, we beseech you, so hardened against your own mercies. If you but knew a thousandth part of the peace, the comfort, the joy, which the Saviour brings with Him, you would not delay another moment. But then, alas! you never can know this but by experience; for has not His word declared that it is a “joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not:” a joy which, even upon earth, makes His people the happiest, and the calmest, amidst all the vicissitudes of time, and yet is here as nothing compared with the joys to which it leads at God’s right

hand. Its seed-time only now, its harvest-time, and O, the riches of that harvest, throughout the ages of eternity. And these joys are at this moment within your reach, yes, we scruple not to say, within the reach of all and every one here present; but we cannot secure them for you. No man may deliver his brother, or make atonement unto God for him, for it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone for ever, says the Psalmist: but of this we may, and do most confidently assure you, that it is your own fault alone, if you possess them not. "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father on His throne."

NOTE.

THE plan of these Lectures not having permitted the Author to dwell upon the historical details of the different Churches to which they refer, he thinks it may not be unacceptable to his younger readers, to present them with a short account of the present state of the places in which these celebrated Churches once flourished.

The following notices of them are selected from the Rev. John Hartley's "Researches in Greece and the Levant." The Apocalyptic Churches were visited by him in 1826.

EPHESUS.—"In a missionary point of view, Ephesus offers now no attractions; her ancient Church has vanished—the candlestick has been removed—and even the Turks who dwell at hand are few in number." p. 233. "The plough has passed over the site of the city! and we saw the green corn growing in all directions amidst the forsaken ruins." p. 235. "At Ephesus, we find at present only one individual who bears the name

of Christ! and where in the whole region do we discover any semblance of primitive Christianity? The country once favoured with the presence of St. Paul, of Timothy, and St. John, is now in the situation of those lands, of which it is said, *Darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people. He, then, that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.*" p. 239.

SMYRNA.—“The Church of Smyrna is represented (Rev. ii. 8—11) as contending with most severe sufferings—poverty, slander, and persecution: but modern Smyrna is a far greater sufferer. The former things have passed away: the faithful Smyrnæans have long since fought their battle and won their crown. But now the evils are of a different order—apostacy, idolatry, superstition, infidelity, and their tremendous consequences.” p. 225. Of the population of Smyrna at present, Mr. Hartley says, “Perhaps there may be 45,000 Turks, 15,000 Greeks, 8,000 Armenians, 8,000 Jews, and less than 1,000 Europeans. The mosques are more than twenty. The Greeks have three churches; the Armenians, one; the Latins, two; the Protestants, two. The Jews have several synagogues.” p. 226.

PERGAMOS,—Does not appear to have been visited by Mr. Hartley.

THYATIRA.—“ Ak-kissar, the modern Thyatira, is situated on a plain, and is embosomed in cypresses and poplars. The buildings are in general mean; but the khan in which we are at present residing is by far the best which I have yet seen. The Greeks are said to occupy three hundred houses, and the Armenians thirty. Each of them has a church.” p. 296.

SARDIS.—“ This morning I have visited Sardis, once the splendid capital of Lydia, the famous residence of Cræsus, the resort of Persian monarchs, and one of the most ancient and magnificent cities of the world. Now how fallen! The ruins are, with one exception, more entirely gone to decay than those of the most ancient cities which we have visited. No Christians reside on the spot: two Greeks only work in a mill here, and a few wretched Turkish huts are scattered among the ruins. I read amidst the ruins the Epistle addressed to the Church once fixed here. What an impressive warning to Christian Churches! *A name to live, while dead.*” p. 294.

PHILADELPHIA.—“ The town is situated on a rising ground, beneath the snowy Mount Timolus.” “ We entered through a ruined wall; massy, but by no means of great antiquity.” “ There is still a numerous Christian population, occupying three

hundred houses. Divine service is performed every Sunday, in five churches ; and there are twenty of a smaller description, in which once a year the Liturgy is read. But though the candlestick remains, its light is obscured : the lamp still exists, but where is its oil ? Where is now the *word* of our Lord's *patience* ?—it is conveyed in sounds unintelligible to those who hear. When the very Epistle to their own church is read, they understand it not." "In a word, Philadelphia has had her share in that utter apostacy from true and practical Christianity which has been the bane of the East." p. 289.

LAODICEA.—"The city of Laodicea was seated on a hill of moderate height, but of considerable extent. Its ruins attest that it was large, populous, and splendid. There are still to be seen an amphitheatre, a theatre, an aqueduct, and many other buildings. But its present condition is in striking conformity with the rebuke and threatening of God. Not a single Christian resides at Laodicea ! No Turk has ever fixed a residence on this forsaken spot. Infidelity itself must confess, that the menace of the Scriptures has been executed." p. 259.



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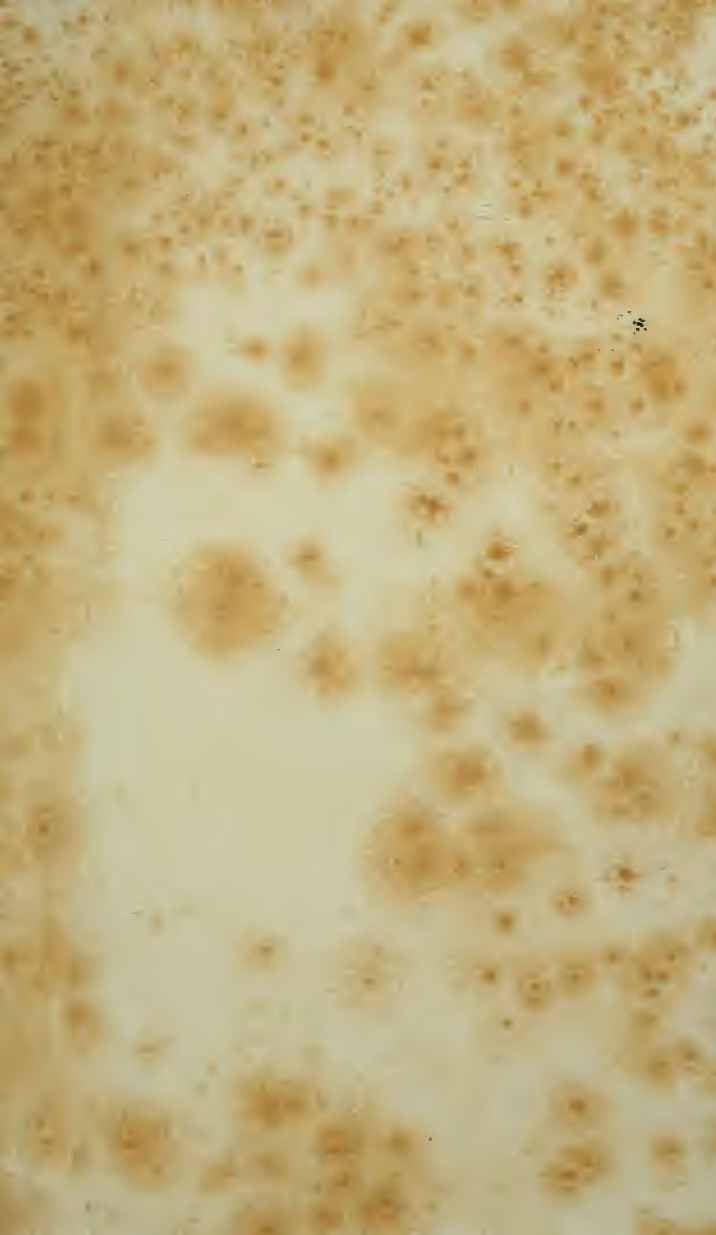
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